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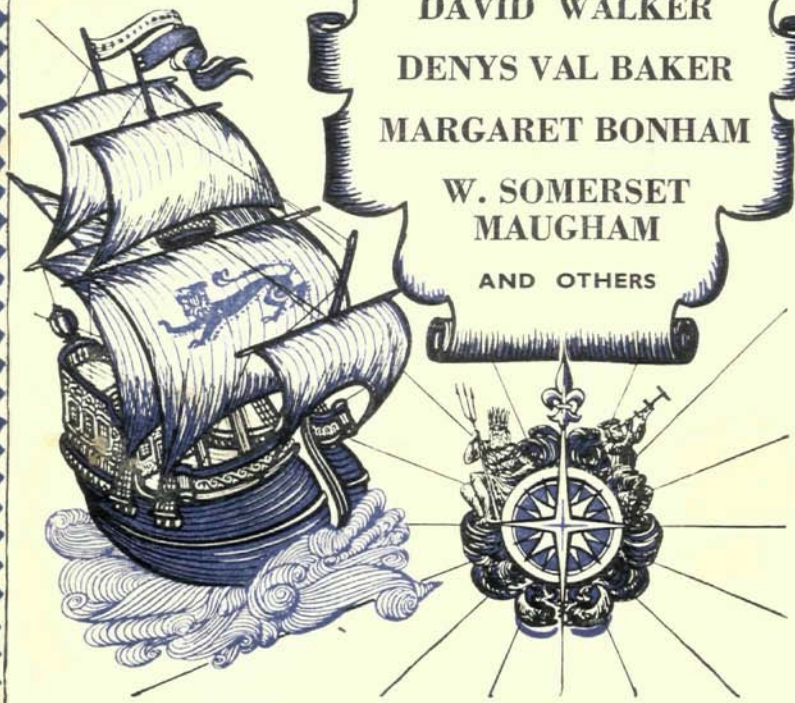

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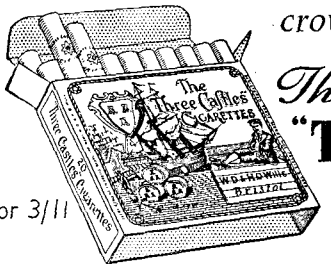


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# Clair de Lune

*NIGHT falls on night*
*And beauty rends her veil of stars, is seen*
*The haunting moon serene.*
*And in her flight*
*She shines alike on lover and on lover,*
*Minstrel and on king.*
*And still she chases*
*Forgotten faces*
*Beside the splendid corridors of night.*

*And still she whispers*
*To the dark stars her sisters,*
*And now the West is falling,*
*And she hears voices calling.*

JOHN EVELYN

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# CHINESE PUZZLE

**Fire indeed and smoke, too. Shocking it was—not natural at all**

## by JOHN WYNDHAM

THE parcel, waiting provocatively on the dresser, was the first thing that Hwyl noticed when he got in from work.

"From Dai, is it?" he inquired of his wife.

"Yes, indeed. Japanese the stamps are," she told him.

He went across to examine it. It was the shape a small hatbox might be, about ten inches each way, perhaps. The address: Mr. & Mrs. Hwyl Hughes, Ty Derwen, Llynllawn, Llangolwgcoch, Brecknockshire, S. Wales, was lettered carefully, for the clear understanding of foreigners. The other label, also hand-lettered, but in red, was quite clear, too. It said: EGGS—*Fragile—With great Care.*

"There is funny to send eggs so far," Hwyl said. "Plenty of eggs we are having. Might be chocolate eggs, I think?"

"Come you to your tea, man," Bronwen told him. "All day I have been looking at that old parcel, and a little longer it can wait now."

Hwyl sat down at the table and began his meal. From time to time, however, his eyes strayed again to the parcel.

"If it is real eggs they are, careful you should be," he remarked. "Reading in a book I was once how in China they keep eggs for years. Bury them in the earth, they do, for a delicacy. There is strange for you, now. Queer they are in China, and not like Wales, at all."

Bronwen contented herself with saying that perhaps Japan was was not like China, either.

When the meal had been finished and cleared, the parcel was transferred to the table. Hwyl snipped the string and pulled off the brown paper. Within was a tin box which, when the sticky tape holding its lid had been removed, proved to be full to the brim with sawdust. Mrs. Hughes fetched a sheet of newspaper, and prudently covered the table-top. Hwyl dug his fingers into the sawdust.

"Something there, there is," he announced.

"There is stupid you are. Of course there is something there," Bronwen said, slapping his hand out of the way.

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She trickled some of the sawdust out on to the newspaper, and then felt inside the box herself. Whatever it was, it felt much too large for an egg. She poured out more sawdust and felt again. This time, her fingers encountered a piece of paper. She pulled it out and laid it on the table; a letter in Dafydd's handwriting. Then she put in her hand once more, got her fingers under the object, and lifted it gently out.

"Well, indeed! Look at that now! Did you ever?" she exclaimed. "Eggs, he was saying, is it?"

They both regarded it with astonishment for some moments.

"So big it is. Queer, too," said Hwyl, at last.

"What kind of bird to lay such an egg?" said Bronwen.

"Ostrich, perhaps?" suggested Hwyl.

But Bronwen shook her head. She had once seen an ostrich's egg in a museum, and remembered it well enough to know that it had little in common with this. The ostrich's egg had been a little smaller, round, with a creamy white and highly polished surface. But this was a large oval, and practically transparent; it had a lustre to it, a nacreous kind of beauty.

"A pearl, could it be?" she said, in an awed voice.

"There is silly you are," said her husband. "From an oyster as big as Llangolwgcoch Town Hall, you are thinking?"

He burrowed into the tin again, but "Eggs," it seemed, had been a manner of speaking: there was no other, nor room for one.

Bronwen put some of the sawdust into one of her best vegetable-dishes, and bedded the egg carefully on top of it. Then they sat down to read their son's letter:

*S.S. Tudor Maid,*
*Kobe.*

*Dear Mam and Dad,*

*I expect you will be surprised about the enclosed I was too. It is a funny looking thing I expect they have funny birds in China after all they have Pandas so why not. We found a small sampan about a hundred miles off the China coast that had bust its mast and should never have tried and all except two of them were dead they are all dead now. But one of them that wasn't dead then was holding this egg-thing all wrapped up in a padded coat like it was a baby only I didn't know it was an egg then not till later.*

*One of them died coming aboard but this other one lasted two days longer in spite of all I could do for him which was my best. I was sorry nobody here can speak Chinese because he was a nice little chap and lonely and knew he was a goner but there it is. And when he saw it was nearly all up he gave me this egg and talked very faint but I'd not have understood anyway. All I could*

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*do was take it and hold it careful the way he had and tell him I'd look after it which he couldn't understand either. Then he said something else and looked very worried and died poor chap.*

*So here it is. I know it is an egg because when I took him a boiled egg once he pointed to both of them to show me but nobody on board knows what kind of egg. But seeing I promised him I'd keep it safe I am sending it to you to keep for me as this ship is no place to keep anything safe anyway and hope it doesn't get cracked on the way too.*

*Hoping this finds you as it leaves me and love to all and you special.*

*Dai.*

"Well, there is strange for you, now," said Mrs. Hughes, as she finished reading. "And *looking* like an egg it is, indeed—the shape of it," she conceded. "But the colours are not. There is pretty they are. Like you see when oil is on the road in the rain. But never an egg like that have I seen in my life. Flat the colour is on eggs, and not to shine."

Hwyl went on looking at it thoughtfully.

"Yes. There is beautiful," he agreed, "but what use?"

"Use, is it, indeed!" said his wife. "A trust, it is, and sacred, too. Dying the poor man was, and our Dai gave him his word. I am thinking of how we will keep it safe for him till he will be back, now."

They both contemplated the egg awhile.

"Very far away, China is," Bronwen remarked, obscurely.

Several days passed, however, before the egg was removed from display on the dresser. Word quickly went round the valley about it, and the callers would have felt slighted had they been unable to see it. Bronwen thought that continually getting it out and putting it away again would be more hazardous than leaving it on exhibition.

Almost everyone found the sight of it rewarding. Idris Bowen who lived three houses away was practically alone in his divergent view.

"The shape of an egg, it has," he allowed. "But careful you should be, Mrs. Hughes. A fertility symbol it is, I am thinking, and stolen, too, likely."

"Mr. Bowen—" began Bronwen, indignantly.

"Oh, by the men in that boat, Mrs. Hughes. Refugees from China they would be, see. Traitors to the Chinese people. And running away with all they could carry, before the glorious army of the workers and peasants could catch them, too. Always the

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same, it is, as you will be seeing when the revolution comes to Wales."

"Oh, dear, dear! There is funny you are, Mr. Bowen. Propaganda you will make out of an old boot, I think," said Bronwen.

Idris Bowen frowned.

"Funny, I am not, Mrs. Hughes. And propaganda there is in an honest boot, too," he told her as he left with dignity.

By the end of a week practically everyone in the village had seen the egg and been told no, Mrs. Hughes did not know what kind of a creature had laid it, and the time seemed to have come to store it away safely against Dafydd's return. There were not many places in the house where she could feel sure that it would rest undisturbed, but, on consideration, the airing-cupboard seemed as likely as any, so she put it back on what sawdust was left in the tin, and stowed it in there.

It remained there for a month, out of sight, and pretty much out of mind until a day when Hwyl returning from work discovered his wife sitting at the table with a disconsolate expression on her face, and a bandage on her finger. She looked relieved to see him.

"Hatched, it is," she observed.

The blankness of Hwyl's expression was irritating to one who had had a single subject on her mind all day.

"Dai's egg," she explained. "Hatched out, it is, I am telling you."

"Well, there is a thing for you, now!" said Hwyl. "A nice little chicken, is it?"

"A chicken it is not, at all. A monster, indeed, and biting me it is, too." She held out her bandaged finger.

She explained that this morning she had gone to the airing-cupboard to take out a clean towel, and as she put her hand in, something had nipped her finger, painfully. At first she had thought that it might be a rat that had somehow got in from the yard, but then she had noticed that the lid was off the tin, and the shell of the egg there was all broken to pieces.

"How is it to see?" Hwyl asked.

Bronwen admitted that she had not seen it well. She had had a glimpse of a long, greeny-blue tail protruding from behind a pile of sheets, and then it had looked at her over the top of them, glaring at her from red eyes. On that, it had seemed to her more the kind of a job a man should deal with, so she had slammed the door, and gone to bandage her finger.

"Still there, then, is it?" said Hwyl.

She nodded.

"Right you. Have a look at it, we will, now then," he said, decisively.

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He started to leave the room, but on second thoughts turned back to collect a pair of heavy working-gloves. Bronwen did not offer to accompany him.

Presently there was a scuffle of his feet, an exclamation or two, then his tread descending the stairs. He came in, shutting the door behind him with his foot. He set the creature he was carrying down on the table, and for some seconds it crouched there, blinking, but otherwise unmoving.

"Scared, he was, I think," Hwyl remarked.

In the body, the creature bore some resemblance to a lizard—a large lizard, over a foot long. The scales of its skin, however, were much bigger, and some of them curled up and stood out here and there, in a fin-like manner. And the head was quite unlike a lizard's, being much rounder, with a wide mouth, broad nostrils, and, over-all, a slightly pushed-in effect, in which were set a pair of goggling red eyes. About the neck, and also making a kind of mane, were curious, streamer-like attachments with the suggestion of locks of hair which had permanently cohered. The colour was mainly green, shot with blue, and having a metallic shine to it, but there were brilliant red markings about the head and in the lower parts of the locks. There were touches of red, too, where the legs joined the body, and on the feet, where the toes finished in sharp yellow claws. Altogether, a surprisingly vivid and exotic creature.

It eyed Bronwen Hughes for a moment, turned a baleful look on Hwyl, and then started to run about the table-top, looking for a way off. The Hughes watched it for a moment or two, and then regarded one another.

"Well, there is nasty for you, indeed," observed Bronwen.

"Nasty it may be. But beautiful it is, too, look," said Hwyl.

"Ugly old face to have," Bronwen remarked.

"Yes, indeed. But fine colours, too, see. Glorious they are, like Technicolor, I am thinking," Hwyl said.

The creature appeared to have half a mind to leap from the table. Hwyl leaned forward and caught hold of it. It wriggled, and tried to get its head round to bite him, but discovered he was holding it too near the neck for that. It paused in its struggles. Then, suddenly, it snorted. Two jets of flame and a puff of smoke came from its nostrils. Hwyl dropped it abruptly, partly from alarm, but more from surprise. Bronwen gave a squeal, and climbed hastily on to her chair.

The creature itself seemed a trifle astonished. For a few seconds it stood turning its head and waving the sinuous tail that was quite as long as its body. Then it scuttled across to the hearth-rug, and curled itself up in front of the fire.

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"By dammo! There was a thing for you!" Hwyl exclaimed, regarding it a trifle nervously. "Fire there was with it, I think. I will like to understand that, now."

"Fire indeed, and smoke, too," Bronwen agreed. "There is shocking it was, and not natural, at all."

She looked uncertainly at the creature. It had so obviously settled itself for a nap that she risked stepping down from the chair, but she kept on watching it, ready to jump up again if it should move. Then:

"Never did I think I will see one of those. And not sure it is right to have in the house, either," she said.

"What is it you are meaning, now?" Hwyl asked, puzzled.

"Why, a dragon, indeed," Bronwen told him.

Hwyl stared at her.

"Dragon!" he exclaimed. "There is foolish—" Then he stopped. He looked at it again, and then down at the place where the flame had scorched his glove. "No, by dammo!" he said. "Right, you. A dragon it is, I believe."

They both regarded it with some apprehension.

"Glad, I am, not to live in China," observed Bronwen.

Those who were privileged to see the creature during the next day or two supported almost to a man the theory that it was a dragon. This, they established by poking sticks through the wire-netting of the hutch that Hwyl had made for it until it obliged with a resentful huff of flame. Even Mr. Jones, the Chapel, did not doubt its authenticity, though on the propriety of its presence in his community he preferred to reserve judgment for the present.

After a short time, however, Bronwen Hughes put an end to the practice of poking it. For one thing, she felt responsible to Dai for its well-being, for another, it was beginning to develop an irritable disposition, and a liability to emit flame without cause; for yet another, and although Mr. Jones' decision on whether it could be considered as one of God's creatures or not was still pending, she felt that in the meantime it deserved equal rights with other dumb animals. So she put a card on the hutch saying: *Please not to Tease*, and most of the time was there to see that it was heeded.

Almost all Llynllawn, and quite a few people from Llangolwgcoch, too, came to see it. Sometimes they would stand for an hour or more, hoping to see it huff. If it did, they went off satisfied that it was a dragon; but if it maintained a contented, non-fire-breathing mood, they went and told their friends that it was really no more than a little old lizard, though big, mind you.

Idris Bowen was an exception to both categories. It was not

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until his third visit that he was privileged to see it snort, but even then he remained unconvinced.

"Unusual, it is, yes," he admitted. "But a dragon it is not. Look you at the dragon of Wales, or the dragon of St. George, now. To huff fire is something, I grant you, but wings, too, a dragon must be having, or a dragon he is not."

But that was the kind of cavilling that could be expected from Idris, and disregarded.

After ten days or so of crowded evenings, however, interest slackened. Once one had seen the dragon and exclaimed over the brilliance of its colouring, there was little to add, beyond being glad that it was in the Hughes' house rather than one's own, and wondering how big it would eventually grow. For, really, it did not do much but sit and blink and perhaps gave a little huff of flame if you were lucky. So, presently, the Hughes' home became more their own again.

And, no longer pestered by visitors, the dragon showed an equable disposition. It never huffed at Bronwen, and seldom at Hwyl. Bronwen's first feeling of antagonism passed quickly, and she found herself growing attached to it. She fed it, and looked after it, and found that on a diet consisting chiefly of minced horseflesh and dog-biscuits it grew with astonishing speed. Most of the time, she let it run free in the room. To quieten the misgivings of callers she would explain:

"Friendly, he is, and pretty ways he has with him, if there is not teasing. Sorry for him, I am, too, for bad it is to be an only child, and an orphan worse still. And less than an orphan, he is, see. Nothing of his own sort he is knowing, nor likely, either. So very lonely he is being poor thing, I think."

But, inevitably, there came an evening when Hwyl, looking thoughtfully at the dragon, remarked:

"Outside you, soon. There is too big for the house you are getting, see."

Bronwen was surprised to find how unwilling she felt about that.

"Very good and quiet, he is," she said. "There is clever he is to tuck his tail away not to trip people, too. And clean with the house he is, also, and no trouble. Always out to the yard at proper times. Right as clockwork."

"Behaving well, he is, indeed," Hwyl agreed. "But growing so fast, now. More room he will be needing, see. A fine hutch for him in the yard, and with a run to it, I think."

The advisability of that was demonstrated a week later when Bronwen came down one morning to find the end of the wooden hutch charred away, the carpet and rug smouldering, and the dragon comfortably curled up in Hwyl's easy chair.

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"Settled, it is, and lucky indeed not to burn in our bed. Out you," Hwyl told the dragon. "A fine thing to burn a man's house for him, and not grateful, either. For shame, I am telling you."

The insurance-man who came to inspect the damage thought similarly.

"Notified, you should have," he told Bronwen. "A fire-risk, he is, you see."

Bronwen protested that the policy made no mention of dragons.

"No, indeed," the man admitted, "but a normal hazard he is not, either. Inquire, I will, from Head Office how it is, see. But better to turn him out before more trouble, and thankful, too."

So, a couple of days later, the dragon was occupying a larger hutch, constructed of asbestos sheets, in the yard. There was a wire-netted run in front of it, but most of the time Bronwen locked the gate, and left the back door of the house open so that he could come and go as he liked. In the morning he would trot in, and help Bronwen by huffing the kitchen fire into a blaze, but apart from that he had learnt not to huff in the house. The only times he was any bother to anyone were the occasions when he set his straw on fire in the night so that the neighbours got up to see if the house was burning, and were somewhat short about it the next day.

Hwyl kept a careful account of the cost of feeding him, and hoped that it was not running into more than Dai would be willing to pay. Otherwise, his only worries were his failure to find a cheap, non-inflammable bedding-stuff, and speculation on how big the dragon was likely to grow before Dai would return to take him off his hands. Very likely all would have gone smoothly until that happened, but for the unpleasantness with Idris Bowen.

The trouble which blew up unexpectedly one evening was really of Idris' own finding. Hwyl had finished his meal, and was peacefully enjoying the last of the day beside his door, when Idris happened along, leading his whippet on a string.

"Oh, hullo you, Idris," Hwyl greeted him, amiably.

"Hullo you, Hwyl," said Idris. "And how is that phony dragon of yours, now then?"

"Phony, is it, you are saying?" repeated Hwyl, indignantly.

"Wings a dragon is wanting, to be a dragon," Idris insisted, firmly.

"Wings to hell, man! Come you and look at him now then, and please to tell me what he is if he is no dragon."

He waved Idris into the house, and led him through into the yard. The dragon, reclining in its wired run, opened an eye at them, and closed it again.

Idris had not seen it since it was lately out of the egg. Its growth impressed him.

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"There is big he is now," he conceded. "Fine, the colours of him, and fancy, too. But still no wings to him, so a dragon he is not."

"What, then, is it he is?" demanded Hwyl.

How Idris would have replied to this difficult question was never to be known, for at that moment the whippet jerked its string free from his fingers, and dashed, barking, at the wire-netting. The dragon was startled out of its snooze. It sat up suddenly, and snorted with surprise. There was a yelp from the whippet which bounded into the air, and then set off round and round the yard, howling. At last, Idris managed to corner it, and pick it up. All down the right side its hair had been scorched off, making it look very peculiar. Idris' eyebrows lowered.

"Trouble you want, is it? And trouble you will be having, by God!" he said.

He put the whippet down again, and began to take off his coat.

It was not clear whether he had addressed, and meant to fight, Hwyl or the dragon, but either intention was forestalled by Mrs. Hughes coming to investigate the yelping.

"Oh! Teasing the dragon, is it!" she said. "There is shameful, indeed. A lamb the dragon is, as people know well. But not to tease. It is wicked you are, Idris Bowen, and to fight does not make right, either. Go you from here, now then."

Idris began to protest, but Bronwen shook her head and set her mouth.

"Not listening to you, I am, see. A fine brave man, to tease a helpless dragon. Not for weeks now has the dragon huffed. So go you, and quick."

Idris glowered. He hesitated, and pulled on his jacket again. He collected his whippet, and held it in his arms. After a final disparaging glance at the dragon, he turned.

"Law I will have of you," he announced ominously, as he left.

Nothing more, however, was heard of legal action. It seemed as if Idris had either changed his mind or been advised against it, and that the whole thing would blow over.

A few mornings later the Hughes were awakened by a hammering on their door. Hwyl went to the window and found Idris below. He asked what the matter was.

"Come you down here, and I will show you," Idris told him.

After some argument, Hwyl descended. Idris led the way round to the back of his own house, and pointed.

"Look you there, now," he said.

The door of Idris' hen-house was hanging by one hinge.

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The remains of two chickens lay close by. A large quantity of feathers was blowing about the yard.

Hwyl looked at the hen-house more closely. Several deep-raked scores stood out white on the creosoted wood. In other places there were darker smears where the wood seemed to have been scorched. Silently Idris pointed to the ground. There were marks of sharp claws, but no imprint of a whole foot.

"There is bad. Foxes is it?" inquired Hwyl.

Idris choked slightly.

"Foxes, you are saying. Foxes, indeed! What will it be but your dragon? And the police to know it, too."

Hwyl shook his head.

"No," he said.

"Oh," said Idris. "A liar, I am, is it? I will have the guts from you, Hwyl Hughes, smoking hot, too, and glad to do it."

"You talk too easy, man," Hwyl told him. "Only that the dragon is still fast in his hutch, I am saying. Come you now, and see."

They went back to Hwyl's house. The dragon was in his hutch, sure enough, and the door of it was fastened with a peg. Furthermore, as Hywl pointed out, even if he had left it during the night, he could not have reached Idris' yard without leaving scratches and traces on the way, and there were none to be found.

They finally parted in a state of armistice. Idris was by no means convinced, but he was unable to get round the fact, and not at all impressed with Hwyl's suggestion that a practical joker could have produced the effect on the hen-house with a strong nail and a blow-lamp.

Hwyl went upstairs again to finish dressing.

"There is funny it is, all the same," he observed to Bronwen. "No eyes that Idris has, for scorched the peg is, on the *outside* of the hutch. And how should that be, I wonder?"

"Huffed four times in the night the dragon has, five perhaps," Bronwen said. "Growling, he is, too, and banging that old hutch about. Never have I heard him like that before."

"There is queer," Hwyl said, frowning. "But never out of his hutch, and that to swear to."

Two nights later Hwyl was awakened by Bronwen shaking his shoulder.

"Listen, now then," she told him.

There was an unmistakable growling going on at the back of the house, and the sound of several snorts.

"Huffing, he is, see," said Bronwen, unnecessarily.

There was a crash of something thrown with force, and the

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sound of a neighbour's voice cursing. Hwyl reluctantly decided that he had better get up and investigate.

Everything in the yard looked as usual, except for the presence of a large tin can which was clearly the object thrown. There was, however, a strong smell of burning and a thudding noise, recognisable as the sound of the dragon tramping round and round in his hutch to stamp out the bedding caught alight again. Hwyl went across and opened the door. He raked out the smouldering straw, fetched some fresh and threw it in.

"Quiet, you," he told the dragon. "More of this, and the hide I will have off you, slow and painful, too. Bed, now then, and sleep."

He went back to bed himself, but it seemed as if he had only just laid his head on the pillow when it was daylight, and there was Idris Bowen hammering on the front door again.

Idris was more than a little incoherent, but Hwyl gathered that something further had taken place at his house, so he slipped on jacket and trousers, and went down. Idris led the way down beside his own house, and threw open the yard door with the air of a conjuror. Hwyl stared for some moments without speaking.

In front of Idris' hen-house stood a kind of trap, roughly contrived of angle-iron and wire-netting. In it, surrounded by chicken feathers, and glaring at them from eyes like live topazes, sat a creature, blood-red all over.

"Now, there is a dragon for you, indeed," Idris said. "Not to have colours like you see on a merry-go-round at a circus, either. A serious dragon, that one, and proper—wings, too, see?"

Hwyl went on looking at the dragon without a word. The wings were folded at present, and the cage did not give room to stretch them. The red, he saw now, was darker on the back, and brighter beneath, giving it the rather ominous effect of being lit from below by a blast-furnace. It certainly had a more practical aspect than his own dragon, and a fiercer look about it altogether. He stepped forward to examine it more closely.

"Careful, man," Idris warned him, laying a hand on his arm.

The dragon curled back its lips, and snorted. Twin flames a yard long shot out of its nostrils. It was a far better huff than the other dragon had ever achieved. The air was filled with a strong smell of burnt feathers.

"A fine dragon, that is," Idris said again. "A real Welsh dragon for you. Angry he is, see, and no wonder. A shocking thing for a Chinese imperialist dragon to be in his country. Come to throw him out, he has, and mincemeat he will be making of your namby-pamby, best-parlour dragon, too!"

"Better for him not to try," said Hwyl, stouter in word than heart.

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"And another thing, too. Red this dragon is, and so a real people's dragon, see."

"Now then. Now then. Propaganda with dragons again, is it? Red the Welsh dragon has been two thousand years, and a fighter, too, I grant you. But a fighter for Wales, look; not just a loud-mouth talker of fighting for peace, see. If it is a good Welsh dragon he is, then out of some kind of egg laid by your Uncle Joe, he is *not;* and thankful, too, I think," Hwyl told him. "And look you," he added as an afterthought, "this one it is who is stealing your chickens, not mine, at all."

"Oh, let him have the old chickens, and glad," Idris said. "Here he is come to chase a foreign imperialist dragon out of his rightful territory, and a proper thing it is, too. None of your D.P. dragons are we wanting round Llynllawn, or South Wales, either."

"Get you to hell, man," Hwyl told him. "Sweet dispositioned my dragon is, no bother to anyone, and no robber of hen-houses, either. If there is trouble at all, the law I will be having of you and your dragon for disturbing of the peace, see. So I am telling you. And good-bye, now."

He exchanged another glance with the angry-looking, topaz eyes of the red dragon, and then stalked away, back to his own house.

That evening, just as Hwyl was sitting down to his meal, there was a knock at the front door. Bronwen went to answer it, and came back.

"Ivor Thomas and Dafydd Ellis wanting you. Something about the Union," she told him.

He went to see them. They had a long and involved story about dues that seemed not to have been fully paid. Hwyl was certain that he was paid up to date, but they remained unconvinced. The argument went on for some time before, with head-shaking and reluctance, they consented to leave. Hwyl returned to the kitchen. Bronwen was waiting, standing by the table.

"Taken the dragon off, they have," she said, flatly.

Hwyl stared at her. The reason why he had been kept at the front door in pointless argument suddenly came to him. He crossed to the window, and looked out. The back fence had been pushed flat, and a crowd of men carrying the dragon's hutch on their shoulders was already a hundred yards beyond it. Turning round, he saw Bronwen standing resolutely against the back door.

"Stealing, it is, and you not calling," he said, accusingly.

"Knocked you down, they would, and got the dragon just the same," she said. "Idris Bowen and his lot, it is."

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Hwyl looked out of the window again.

"What to do with him, now then?" he asked.

"Dragon fight, it is," she told him. "Betting, they were. Five to one on the Welsh dragon, and sounding very sure, too."

Hwyl shook his head.

"Not to wonder, either. There is not fair, at all. Wings, that Welsh dragon has, so air attacks he can make. Unsporting, there is, and shameful indeed."

He looked out of the window again. More men were joining the party as it marched its burden across the waste-ground, towards the slag-heap. He sighed.

"There is sorry I am for our dragon. Murder it will be, I think. But go and see it, I will. So no tricks from that Idris to make a dirty fight dirtier."

Bronwen hesitated.

"No fighting for you? You promise me?" she said.

"Is it a fool I am, girl, to be fighting fifty men, and more. Please to grant me some brains, now."

She moved doubtfully out of his way, and let him open the door. Then she snatched up a scarf, and ran after him, tying it over her head as she went.

The crowd that was gathering on a piece of flat ground near the foot of the slag-heap already consisted of something more like a hundred men than fifty, and there were more hurrying to join it. Several self-constituted stewards were herding people back to clear an oval space.

At one end of it was the cage in which the red dragon crouched huddled, with a bad-tempered look. At the other, the asbestos hutch was set down, and its bearers withdrew. Idris noticed Hwyl and Bronwen as they came up.

"And how much is it you are putting on your dragon?" he inquired, with a grin.

Bronwen said, before Hwyl could reply:

"Wicked, it is, and shamed you should be, Idris Bowen. Clip you your dragon's wings to fight fair, and we will see. But betting against a horseshoe in the glove, we are not." And she dragged Hwyl away.

All about the oval the laying of bets went on, with the Welsh dragon gaining favour all the time. Presently, Idris stepped out into the open and held up his hands for quiet.

"Sport it is for you tonight. Super-colossal attraction, as they are saying on the movies, and never again, likely. So put you your money, now. When the English law is hearing of this, no more dragon-fighting, it will be—like no more to cock-fight."

A boo went up, mingled with the laughter of those who knew

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a thing or two about cock-fighting that the English law did not. Idris went on:

"So now the dragon championship, I am giving you. On my right, the Red Dragon of Wales, on his home ground. A people's dragon, see. For more than a coincidence, it is, that the colour of the Welsh dragon—"

His voice was lost for some moments in controversial shouts. It re-emerged, saying: "—on the left, the decadent dragon of the imperialist exploiters of the suffering Chinese people who, in their glorious fight for peace under the heroic leadership—" But the rest of his introduction was also lost among the catcalls and cheers that were still continuing when he beckoned forward attendants from the ends of the oval, and withdrew.

At one end, two men reached up with a hooked pole, pulled over the contraption that enclosed the red dragon, and ran back hurriedly. At the far end, a man knocked the peg from the asbestos door, pulled it open, scuttled round behind the hutch, and no less speedily out of harm's way.

The red dragon looked round, uncertainly. It tentatively tried unfurling its wings. Finding that possible, it reared up on its hind legs, supporting itself on its tail, and flapped them energetically, as though to dispel the creases.

The other dragon ambled out of its hutch, advanced a few feet, and stood blinking. Against the background of the waste-ground and the slag-heap it looked more than usually exotic. It yawned largely with a fine display of fangs, rolled its eyes hither and thither, and then caught sight of the red dragon.

Simultaneously, the red dragon noticed the other. It stopped flapping, and dropped to all four feet. The two regarded one another. A hush came over the crowd. Both dragons remained motionless, except for a slight waving of the last or so of their tails.

The oriental dragon turned its head a little on one side. It snorted slightly, and shrivelled up a patch of weeds.

The red dragon stiffened. It suddenly adopted a pose gardant, one forefoot uplifted with claws extended, wings raised. It huffed with vigour, vaporized a puddle, and disappeared momentarily in a cloud of steam. There was an anticipatory murmur from the crowd.

The red dragon began to pace round, circling the other, giving a slight flap of its wings now and then.

The crowd watched it intently. So did the other dragon. It did not move from its position, but turned as the red dragon circled, keeping its head and gaze steadily towards it.

With the circle almost completed, the red dragon halted. It extended its wings widely, and gave a full-throated roar. Simul-

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taneously, it gushed two streams of fire, and belched a small cloud of black smoke. The part of the crowd nearest to it moved back apprehensively.

At this tense moment Bronwen Hughes began suddenly to laugh. Hwyl shook her by the arm.

"Hush, you! There is not funny, at all," he said, but she did not stop at once.

The oriental dragon did nothing for a moment. It appeared to be thinking the matter over. Then it turned swiftly round, and began to run. The crowd behind it raised a jeer, those in front waved their arms to shoo it back. But the dragon was unimpressed by arm-waving. It came on, with now and then a short spurt of flame from its nostrils. The people wavered and then scattered out of its way. Half-a-dozen men started to chase after it with sticks, but soon gave up. It was travelling at twice the pace they could run.

With a roar, the red dragon leapt into the air, and came across the field, spitting flames like a strafing aircraft. The crowd scattered still more swiftly, tumbling over itself as it cleared a way.

The running dragon disappeared round the foot of the slag-heap, with the other hovering above it. Shouts of disappointment rose from the crowd, and a good part of it started to follow, to be in at the death.

But in a minute or two the running dragon came into view again. It was making a fine pace up the mountainside, with the red dragon still flying a little behind it. Everybody stood watching it wind its way up and up until finally it disappeared over the shoulder. For a moment the flying dragon still showed as a black silhouette above the skyline, then, with a final whiff of flame, it, too, disappeared—and the arguments about paying up began.

Idris left the wrangling to come across to the Hughes.

"So there is a coward your imperialist dragon is, then. And not one good huff, or a bite to him, either," he said.

Bronwen looked at him, and smiled.

"So foolish, you are, Idris Bowen, with your head full of propaganda and fighting. Other things than to fight, there is, even for dragons.

"Such a brave show your red dragon was making, such a fine show, oh, yes—and very like a peacock, I am thinking. Very like the boys in their Sunday suits in Llangolwgcoch High Street, too—all dressed up to kill, but not to fight."

Idris stared at her.

"And our dragon," she went on. "Well, there is not a very new trick, either. Done a bit of it before now, I have, myself." She cast a sidelong glance at Hwyl.

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Light began to dawn on Idris.

"But—but it is *he* you were always calling your dragon," he protested.

Bronwen shrugged.

"Oh, yes, indeed. But how to tell with dragons?" she asked. She turned to look up the mountain.

"There is lonely, lonely the red dragon must have been these two thousand years—so, not much bothering with your politics he is, just now. More single with his mind, see. And interesting it will be, indeed, to be having a lot of baby dragons in Wales before long, I am thinking."

* * *

## *READING WITHOUT TEARS!*

Something amusing happened today. I was in Mrs. Morgan's bookshop in Blackwood Street, Walworth. On the floor was a pile of some twenty books. I looked at them. They seemed a very dull lot and so I said to Mrs. Morgan, "These seem all junk. I suppose they are for waste paper?"

She said, "Oh, no. They are for tearing!"

"For tearing?" I said. "I don't understand."

"They are worth three shillings a dozen to be torn in half," she said.

I tried to sort that statement out, but could make no sense. Who'd want to pay threepence to tear a book in half? Why on earth tear it in any case? Then she explained. One of her customers was a street kerb-side entertainer. He was a strong man. He bent iron and nails. He tore books in half to show his strength, because he was finding it difficult to obtain telephone directories (which were much more impressive to tear in half, but considerably *less* difficult than ordinary books).

He had a standing order with Mrs. Morgan, and gave her three shillings a dozen for any books about nine by six in size. He did not care for crown octavo ($7\frac{1}{2}$ by 5) standard library size books, as he could not easily get a grip upon them with his large hands. The extra one and a half inches allowed him leverage.

This is the first time in thirty years' bookselling that I've come upon such a method of bookselling—not for reading, but merely for being torn in half!

*Fred Bason's Second Diary*

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# POINT OF HONOUR

**"But surely," I asked, "no man would behave like that now?"**

## by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

SOME years ago, being engaged on writing a book about Spain in the Golden Age, I had occasion to read again the plays of Calderón. Among others I read one called *El Médico de Su Honra*, which means "The Physician of His Honour." It is a cruel play and you can hardly read it without a shudder. But re-reading it, I was reminded of an encounter I had had many years before which has always remained in my memory as one of the strangest I have ever had.

I was quite young then and I had gone to Seville on a short visit to see the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi. It was the height of summer and the heat was terrific. Great sail-cloths were drawn across the narrow streets, giving a grateful shade, but in the squares the sun beat down mercilessly. In the morning I watched the procession. It was splendid and impressive. The crowd knelt down as the Host was solemnly carried past and the Civil Guards in full uniform stood at salute to do homage to the heavenly King. And in the afternoon I joined the dense throng which was making its way to the bull ring.

The cigarette girls and the sewing girls wore carnations in their dark hair and their young men were dressed in all their best. It was just after the Spanish-American War and the short, embroidered jacket, the skin-tight trousers and the broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat were still worn. Sometimes the crowd was scattered by a picador on the wretched hack that would never survive the afternoon, and the rider, with conscious pride in his picturesque costume, exchanged pleasantries with the facetious. A long line of carriages, dilapidated and shabby, overfilled with aficionados, that is to say fans, drove noisily along.

I went early, for it amused me to see the people gradually filling the vast arena. The cheaper seats in the sun were already packed and it was a curious effect that the countless fans made, like the fluttering of a host of butterflies, as men and women restlessly fanned themselves. In the shade, where I was sitting, the places were taken more slowly, but even there, an hour before the fight began, one had to look rather carefully for a seat. Presently a

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man stopped in front of me and with a pleasant smile asked if I could make room for him. When he had settled down, I took a sidelong glance at him and noticed that he was well-dressed, in English clothes, and looked like a gentleman. He had beautiful hands, small but resolute, with thin, long fingers. Wanting a cigarette, I took out my case and thought it would be polite to offer him one. He gave me a glance and accepted. He had evidently seen that I was a foreigner, for he thanked me in French.

"You are English?" he went on.

"Yes."

"How is it you haven't run away from the heat?"

I explained that I had come on purpose to see the Feast of Corpus Christi.

"After all, it's something you must come to Seville for."

Then I made some casual remark about the vast concourse of people.

"No one would imagine that Spain was bleeding from the loss of all that remained of her Empire and that her ancient glory is now nothing but a name."

"There's a great deal left."

"The sunshine, the blue sky, and the future."

He spoke dispassionately, as though the misfortunes of his fallen country were no concern of his. Not knowing what to reply, I remained silent. We waited. The boxes began to fill up. Ladies in their mantillas of black or white lace entered them and spread their Manilla shawls over the front of them so as to form a gay and many-coloured drapery. Now and then, when one of them was of particular beauty, a round of applause would greet her appearance and she would smile and bow without embarrassment. At last the president of the bull-fight made his entry, the band struck up, and the fighters, all glittering in their satin, in gold and silver, marched swaggering across the ring. A minute later a great black bull charged in.

Carried away by the horrible excitement of the contest I noticed, notwithstanding, that my neighbour remained cool. When a man fell and only escaped by a miracle the horns of the furious beast, and with a gasp thousands sprang to their feet he remained motionless. The bull was killed and the mules dragged out the huge carcass. I sank back exhausted.

"Do you like bull-fighting?" he asked me. "Most English do, though I have noticed that in their own country they say hard enough things about it."

"Can one like something that fills one with horror and loathing? Each time I come to a fight I swear I will never go to another. And yet I do."

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"It's a curious passion that leads us to delight in the peril of others. Perhaps it's natural to the human race. The Romans had their gladiators and the moderns their melodramas. It may be that it is an instinct in man to find pleasure in bloodshed and torture."

I did not answer directly.

"Don't you think that the bull-fight is the reason why human life is of so little account in Spain?"

"And do you think human life is of any great value?" he asked.

I gave him a quick look, for there was an ironical tone in his voice that no one could have missed, and I saw that his eyes were full of mockery. I flushed a little, for he made me on a sudden feel very young. I was surprised at the change of his expression. He had seemed rather an amiable man, with his large soft friendly eyes, but now his face bore a look of sardonic hauteur which was a trifle disquieting. I shrank back into my shell. We said little to one another during the rest of the afternoon, but when the last bull was killed and we all rose to our feet he shook hands with me and expressed the hope that we might meet again. It was a mere politeness and neither of us, I imagine, thought that there was even a remote possibility of it.

But quite by chance, two or three days later, we did. I was in a quarter of Seville that I did not know very well. I had been that afternoon to the palace of the Duke of Alba which I knew had a fine garden and in one of the rooms a magnificent ceiling reputed to have been made by Moorish captives before the fall of Granada. It was not easy to gain admittance, but I wanted very much to see it and I thought that now, in the height of summer when there were no tourists, with two or three pesetas I might be allowed in. I was disappointed. The man in charge told me that the house was under repair and no stranger could visit it without a written permission from the Duke's agent. So, having nothing else to do, I went to the royal garden of the Alcázar, the old palace of Don Pedro the Cruel, whose memory lives still among the people of Seville. It was very pleasant among the orange trees and cypresses. I had a book with me, a volume of Calderón, and I sat there for a while and read. Then I went for a stroll.

In the older parts of Seville the streets are narrow and tortuous. It is delicious to wander along them under the awnings that stretch above, but not easy to find one's way. I lost mine. When I had just made up my mind that I had no notion in which direction to turn I saw a man walking towards me and recognized my acquaintance of the bull ring. I stopped him and asked whether he could direct me. He remembered me.

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"You'll never find your way," he smiled, turning round. "I'll walk a little with you until you can't mistake it."

I protested, but he would not listen. He assured me it was no trouble.

"You haven't gone away then?" he said.

"I'm leaving tomorrow. I've just been to the Duke of Alba's house. I wanted to see that Moorish ceiling of his, but they wouldn't let me in."

"Are you interested in Arabic art?"

"Well, yes. I've heard that that ceiling is one of the finest things in Seville."

"I think I could show you one as good."

"Where?"

He looked at me for a moment reflectively as though wondering what sort of a person I was. If he was he evidently came to a satisfactory decision.

"If you have ten minutes to spare I will take you to it."

I thanked him warmly and we turned back and retraced our steps. We chatted of indifferent things till we came to a large house, washed in pale green, with the Arabic look of a prison, the windows on the street heavily barred, which so many houses in Seville have. My guide clapped his hands at the gateway and a servant looked out from a window into the patio, and pulled a cord.

"Whose house is this?"

"Mine."

I was surprised, for I knew how jealously Spaniards guarded their privacy and how little inclined they were to admit strangers into their houses. The heavy iron gate swung open and we walked into the courtyard; we crossed it and went through a narrow passage. Then I found myself suddenly in an enchanted garden.

It was walled on three sides, with walls as high as houses; and their old red brick, softened by time, was covered with roses. They clad every inch in wanton, scented luxuriance. In the garden, growing wildly, as if the gardeners had striven in vain to curb the exuberance of nature, were palm trees rising high into the air in their passionate desire for the sun, dark orange trees and trees in flower whose names I did not know, and among them roses and more roses. The fourth wall was a Moorish loggia, with horseshoe arches heavily decorated with tracery, and when we entered this I saw the magnificent ceiling. It was like a little bit of the Alcázar, but it had not suffered the restorations that have taken all the charm from that palace, and the colours were exquisitely tender. It was a gem.

"Believe me, you need not regret that you have not been able to see the Duke's house. Further, you can say that you have seen

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something that no other foreigner has seen within living memory."

"It's very kind of you to have shown it to me. I'm infinitely grateful."

He looked about him with a pride with which I could sympathize.

"It was built by one of my own ancestors in the time of Don Pedro the Cruel. It is very likely that the King himself more than once caroused under this ceiling with my ancestor."

I held out the book I was carrying.

"I've just been reading a play in which Don Pedro is one of the characters."

"What is the book?"

I handed it to him and he glanced at the title. I looked about me.

"Of course, what adds to the beauty is that wonderful garden," I said. "The whole impression is incredibly romantic."

The Spaniard was evidently pleased with my enthusiasm. He smiled. I had already noticed how grave his smile was. It hardly dispelled the habitual melancholy of his expression.

"Would you like to sit down for a few minutes and smoke a cigarette?"

"I should love to."

We walked out into the garden and we came upon a lady sitting on a bench of Moorish tiles like those in the gardens of the Alcázar. She was working at some embroidery. She looked up quickly, evidently taken aback to see a stranger, and gave my companion an inquiring stare.

"Allow me to present you to my wife," he said.

The lady gravely bowed. She was very beautiful, with magnificent eyes, a straight nose with delicate nostrils and a pale smooth skin. In her black hair, abundant as with most Spanish women, there was a broad white streak. Her face was quite unlined and she could not have been more than thirty.

"You have a very lovely garden, Señora," I said.

She gave it an indifferent glance.

"Yes, it is pretty."

I felt suddenly embarrassed. I did not expect her to show me any cordiality and I could not blame her if she thought my intrusion merely a nuisance. There was something about her that I could not quite make out. It was not an active hostility. Absurd as it seemed, since she was a young woman and beautiful, I felt that there was something dead in her.

"Are you going to sit here?" she asked her husband.

"With your permission. Only for a few minutes."

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"I won't disturb you."

She gathered her silks and the canvas on which she had been working and rose to her feet. When she stood up I saw that she was rather taller than Spanish women generally are. She gave me an unsmiling bow. She carried herself with a sort of royal composure and her gait was stately. I was flippant in those days and I remember saying to myself that she was not the sort of girl you could very well think of being silly with. We sat down on the multi-coloured red bench and I gave my host a cigarette. I held a match to it. He had still my volume of Calderón in his hands and now he idly turned the pages.

"Which of the plays have you been reading?"

"*El Médico de Su Honra.*"

He gave me a look and I thought I discerned in his large eyes a sardonic glint.

"And what do you think of it?"

"I think it's revolting. The fact is, of course, that the idea is so foreign to our modern notions."

"What idea?"

"The point of honour and all that sort of thing."

I should explain that the point of honour is the mainspring of much of the Spanish drama. It is the nobleman's code that impels a man to kill his wife, in cold blood, not only if she has been unfaithful to him, but even if, however little she was to blame, her conduct has given rise to scandal. In this particular play there is an example of this more deliberate than any I have ever read: the physician of his honour takes vengeance on his wife, though aware that she is innocent, simply as a matter of decorum.

"It's in the Spanish blood," said my friend. "The foreigner must just take it or leave it."

"Oh, come, a lot of water has flowed down the Guadalquivir since Calderón's day. You're not going to pretend that any man would behave like that now."

"On the contrary I pretend that even now a husband who finds himself in such a humiliating and ridiculous position can only regain his self-respect by the offender's death."

I did not answer. It seemed to me that he was pulling a romantic gesture and within me I murmured, bosh. He gave me an ironic smile.

"Have you ever heard of Don Pedro Aguria?"

"Never."

"The name is not unknown in Spanish history. An ancestor was Admiral of Spain under Philip II and another was bosom friend to Philip IV. By royal command he sat for his portrait to Velásquez."

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My host hesitated a moment. He gave me a long, reflective stare before he went on.

"Under the Philips the Agurias were rich, but by the time my friend Don Pedro succeeded his father their circumstances were much reduced. But still he was not poor, he had estates between Cordova and Aguilar, and in Seville his house retained at least traces of its ancient splendour. The little world of Seville was astonished when he announced his engagement to Soledad, the daughter of the ruined Count of Acaba, for though her family was distinguished her father was an old scamp. He was crippled with debts and the shifts he resorted to in order to keep his head above water were none too nice. But Soledad was beautiful and Don Pedro madly in love with her.

"They were married. He adored her with the vehement passion of which perhaps only a Spaniard is capable. But he discovered to his dismay that she did not love him. She was kind and gentle. She was a good wife and a good housekeeper. She was grateful to him. But that was all. He thought that when she had a child she would change, but the child came, and it made no difference. The barrier between them that he had felt from the beginning was still there. He suffered. At last he told himself that she had a character too noble, a spirit too delicate, to descend to earthly passion, and he resigned himself. She was too high above him for mortal love."

I moved a little uneasily in my seat. I thought the Spaniard was unduly rhetorical. He went on:

"You know that here in Seville the Opera House is open only for the six weeks after Easter, and since the Sevillans don't care very much for European music we go more to meet our friends than to listen to the singers. The Agurias had a box, like everybody else, and they went on the opening night of the season. *Tannhäuser* was being given. Don Pedro and his wife, like typical Spaniards, with nothing to do all day, but always late, did not arrive till nearly the end of the first act. In the interval the Count of Acaba, Soledad's father, came into the box accompanied by a young officer of artillery whom Don Pedro had never seen before. But Soledad seemed to know him well.

"'Here is Pepe Alvarez,' said the Count. 'He's just come back from Cuba and I insisted on bringing him to see you.'

"Soledad smiled and held out her hand, then introduced the newcomer to her husband.

"'Pepe is the son of the attorney at Carmona. We used to play together when we were children.'

"Carmona is a small town near Seville and it was here that the Count had retired when his creditors in the city grew too

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troublesome. The house he owned there was almost all that was left him of the fortune he had squandered. He lived in Seville now through Don Pedro's generosity. But Don Pedro did not like him and he bowed stiffly to the young officer. He guessed that his father, the attorney, and the Count had been concerned together in transactions that were none too reputable. In a minute he left the box to talk with his cousin, the Duchess of Santaguador, whose box was opposite his own. A few days later he met Pepe at his club in the Sierpes and had a chat with him. To his surprise he found him a very pleasant young fellow. He was full of his exploits in Cuba and he related them with humour.

"The six weeks about Easter and the great Fair are the gayest in Seville and the world meets to exchange gossip and laughter at one festivity after another. Pepe with his good nature and high spirits was in great request and the Agurias met him constantly. Don Pedro saw that he amused Soledad. She was more vivacious when he was there and her laughter, which he had so seldom heard, was a delight to him. Like other members of the aristocracy he took a booth for the Fair where they danced, supped and drank champagne till dawn. Pepe was always the life and soul of the parties.

"One night Don Pedro was dancing with the Duchess of Santaguador and they passed Soledad with Pepe Alvarez.

"'Soledad is looking very beautiful this evening,' she remarked.

"'And happy,' he replied.

"'Is it true that once she was engaged to be married to Pepe?'

"'Of course not.'

"But the question startled him. He had known that Soledad and Pepe had known one another when they were children, but it had never crossed his mind that there could have been anything between them. The Count of Acaba, though a rogue, was a gentleman by birth and it was inconceivable that he could have thought of marrying his daughter to the son of a provincial attorney. When they got home Don Pedro told his wife what the duchess had said and what he had replied.

"'But I was engaged to Pepe,' she said.

"'Why did you never tell me?'

"'It was finished and done with. He was in Cuba. I never expected to see him again.'

"'There must be people who know you were engaged to him.'

"'I daresay. Does it matter?'

"'Very much. You shouldn't have renewed your acquaintance with him when he returned.'

"'Does that mean that you have no confidence in me?'

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"'Of course not. I have every confidence in you. All the same I wish you to discontinue it now.'

"'And if I refuse?'

"'I shall kill him.'

"They looked long into one another's eyes. Then she gave him a little bow and went to her room. Don Pedro sighed. He wondered whether she still loved Pepe and whether it was on account of this that she had never loved him. But he would not allow himself to give way to the unworthy emotion of jealousy. He looked into his heart and was sure that it harboured no feeling of hatred for the young artilleryman. On the contrary, he liked him. This was not an affair of love or hate, but of honour.

"On a sudden he remembered that a few days before when he went to his club he noticed that the conversation suddenly failed and, looking back, he seemed to remember that several of the group who were sitting there and chatting eyed him curiously. Was it possible that he had been the subject of their conversation? He shivered a little at the thought.

"The Fair was drawing to its end and when it was over the Agurias had arranged to go to Cordova where Don Pedro had an estate which it was necessary for him to visit from time to time. He had looked forward to the peace of a country life after the turmoil of Seville. The day after this conversation Soledad, saying she was not well, stayed in the house, and she did the same the day following. Don Pedro visited her in her room morning and evening and they talked of indifferent things. But on the third day his cousin Conchita de Santaguador was giving a ball. It was the last of the season and everyone in her exclusive set would be there. Soledad, saying she was still indisposed, announced that she would stay at home.

"'Are you refusing to go because of our conversation of the other night?' Don Pedro asked.

"'I have been thinking over what you said. I think your demand unreasonable, but I shall accede to it. The only way I can cease my friendship with Pepe is by not going to places where I am likely to meet him.' A tremor of pain passed over her lovely face. 'Perhaps it is best.'

"'Do you love him still?'

"'Yes.'

"Don Pedro felt himself go cold with anguish.

"'Then why did you marry me?'

"'Pepe was away, in Cuba; no one knew when he would come back. Perhaps never. My father said that I must marry you.'

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"'To save him from ruin?'

"'From worse than ruin.'

"'I am very sorry for you.'

"'You have been very kind to me. I have done everything in my power to prove to you that I am grateful.'

"'And does Pepe love you?'

"She shook her head and smiled sadly.

"'Men are different. He's young. He's too gay to love anyone very long. No, to him I'm just the friend with whom he used to play when he was a child and flirt when he was a boy. He can make jokes about the love he once had for me.'

"He took her hand and pressed it, then kissed it and left her. He went to the ball by himself. His friends were sorry to hear of Soledad's indisposition, but after expressing a proper sympathy devoted themselves to the evening's amusement. Don Pedro drifted into the card room. There was room at a table and he sat down to play chemin de fer. He played with extraordinary luck and made a good deal of money.

"One of the players laughingly asked where Soledad was that evening. Don Pedro saw another give him a startled glance, but he laughed and answered that she was safely in bed and asleep. Then an unlucky incident occurred. Some young man came into the room and addressing an artillery officer who was playing asked where Pepe was.

"'Isn't he here?' said the officer.

"'No.'

"An odd silence fell upon the party. Don Pedro exercised all his self-control to prevent his face from showing what he suddenly felt. The thought flashed through his mind that Pepe was with Soledad and that those men at the table suspected it too. Oh, the shame! The indignity! He forced himself to go on playing for another hour and still he won. He could not go wrong. The game broke up and he returned to the ballroom. He went up to his cousin.

"'I've hardly had a word with you,' he said. 'Come into another room and let us sit down for a little.'

"'If you like.'

"The room was empty.

"'Where is Pepe Alvarez tonight?' he asked casually.

"'I can't think.'

"'You were expecting him?'

"'Of course.'

"She was smiling as he was, but he noticed that she looked at him sharply. He dropped his mask of casualness and, though they were alone, lowered his voice.

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"'Conchita, I beseech you to tell me the truth. Are they saying that he is Soledad's lover?'

"'Pedrito, what an incredible question to put to me.'

"But he had seen the terror in her eyes and the sudden instinctive movement of her hand to her face.

"'You've answered it.'

"He got up and left her. He went home and looking up from the patio saw a light in his wife's room. He went upstairs and knocked at the door. There was no answer, but he went in. To his surprise, for it was late, she was sitting up working at the embroidery upon which much of her time was spent.

"'Why are you working at this hour?'

"'I couldn't sleep, I couldn't read. I thought it would distract my mind if I worked.'

"He did not sit down.

"'Soledad, I have something to tell you that must cause you pain. I must ask you to be brave. Pepe was not at Conchita's tonight.'

"'What is that to me?'

"'It is unfortunate that you were not there either. Everyone at the ball thought that you were together.'

"'That's preposterous.'

"'I know, but that doesn't help matters. You could have opened the gate for him yourself and let him out, or you could have slipped out yourself without anyone seeing you go or come.'

"'But do you believe it?'

"'No. I agreed with you that the thing was preposterous. Where was Pepe?'

"'How do I know? How should I know?'

"'It is very strange that he should not have come to the most brilliant party, the last party, of the season.'

"She was silent for a minute.

"'The night after you spoke to me about him I wrote and told him that in view of the circumstances I thought it would be better if in future we saw no more of one another than could be helped. It may be that he did not go to the ball for the same reason that I did not.'

"They were silent for a while. He looked down at the ground, but he felt that her eyes were fixed on him. I should have told you before that Don Pedro possessed one accomplishment which raised him above his fellows, but at the same time was a drawback. He was the best shot in Andalusia. Everyone knew this and it would have been a brave man who ventured to offend him. A few days earlier there had been pigeon-shooting at Tablada, the wide common outside Seville along the Guadalquivir, and Don

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Pedro had beaten everybody. Pepe on the other hand had shown himself so indifferent a marksman that everyone had laughed at him. The young artilleryman had borne the chaff with good humour. Cannon were his weapon, he said.

"'What are you going to do?' Soledad asked.

"'You know that there is only one thing I can do.'

"She understood. But she tried to treat what he had said as a pleasantry.

"'You're childish. We're not living any more in the sixteenth century.'

"'I know. That is why I am talking to you now. If I have to challenge Pepe I shall kill him. I don't want to do that. If he will resign his commission and leave Spain I will do nothing.'

"'How can he? Where is he to go?'

"'He can go to South America. He may make his fortune.'

"'Do you expect me to tell him that?'

"'If you love him.'

"'I love him too much to ask him to run away like a coward. How could he face life without honour?'

"Don Pedro laughed.

"'What has Pepe Alvarez, the son of the attorney at Carmona, to do with honour?'

"She did not answer, but in her eyes he saw the fierce hatred she bore him. That look stabbed his heart, for he loved her as passionately as ever.

"Next day he went to his club and joined a group who were sitting at the window looking out at the crowd passing up and down the Sierpes. Pepe was in it. They were talking of last night's party.

"'Where were you, Pepe?' someone asked.

"'My mother was ill. I had to go down to Carmona,' he answered. 'I was dreadfully disappointed, but perhaps it was all for the best.' He turned laughingly to Don Pedro. 'I hear you were in luck and won everybody's money.'

"'When are you going to give us our revenge, Pedrito?' asked another.

"'I'm afraid you'll have to wait for that,' he answered. 'I have to go to Cordova. I find that my attorney has been robbing me. I know that all attorneys are thieves, but I stupidly thought this one was honest.'

"He seemed to speak quite lightly and it was as lightly that Pepe put in his word.

"'I think you exaggerate, Pedrito. Don't forget that my father is an attorney and he at least is honest.'

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"'I don't believe it for a minute,' laughed Don Pedro. 'I have no doubt your father is as big a thief as any.'

"The insult was so unexpected and so unprovoked that for a moment Pepe was staggered. The others were startled into sudden seriousness.

"'What do you mean, Pedrito?'

"'Exactly what I say.'

"'It's a lie and you know it's a lie. You must withdraw that at once.'

"Don Pedro laughed.

"'Of course I shall not withdraw. Your father is a thief and a rascal.'

"Pepe did the only thing he could do. He sprang from his chair and with his open hand hit Don Pedro in the face. The outcome was inevitable. Next day the two men met on the frontier of Portugal. Pepe Alvarez, the attorney's son, died like a gentleman with a bullet in his heart."

The Spaniard ended his story on such a casual note that for the first moment I hardly took it in. But when I did I was profoundly shocked.

"Barbarous," I said. "It was just cold-blooded murder."

My host got up from his chair.

"You're talking nonsense, my young friend. Don Pedro did the only thing he could do in the circumstances."

I left Seville next day and from then till now have never been able to discover the name of the man who told me this strange story. I have often wondered whether the lady I saw, the lady with the pale face and the lock of white hair, was the unhappy Soledad.

* * *

## *MONOMANIA*

The American passion for specialisation comes out well in a story told by an endocrinologist who recently went on a lecture tour of the United States. When he disembarked reporters gathered round to interview him. What was his profession?

"A doctor," he replied.

This did not seem to interest them in the slightest, there being rather a lot of doctors in America.

"A specialist," he elucidated. Then seeing that he was making no impression at all he finally brought out the great word.

"I'm an endocrinologist."

"Yeah," said one of the reporters in bored tones, "which gland?" LUCIO, *in The Manchester Guardian*

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# SEA FANTASY

**Full many a gem of purest ray serene**
**The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear**

THOMAS GRAY, *Elegy*

There is one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath; like those fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod over the buried evangelist, St. John. And meet it is that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling, watery prairies and Potters' Fields of all four continents, the waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly; for here, millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still; tossing like slumberers in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness.

HERMAN MELVILLE, *Moby Dick*

## *Mid-Ocean Moonlight*

*We hold the secrets,*
*we, the deep waters;*
*we keep your wonder*
*locked in our laughter;*
*we keep your sadness*
*cool in our heart.*

*We nurse the treasure*
*of moon-silver madness;*
*deep in our singing*
*a weft of fine dreams.*

*We hold the secrets;*
*we, the deep waters,*
*mirror the magic*
*of stars in our lilting,*
*echo the fullness*
*of night in our song.*

EDMUND COOPER

## *The Culprit*

The captains . . . talk of a little bulbous-bottomed Dutch goblin, in trunk hose and sugar-loaf hat, with a speaking trumpet in his hand . . . They declare they have heard him, in stormy weather, in the midst of the turmoil, giving orders in Low Dutch for the piping up a fresh gust of wind, or the rattling off of another thunder-clap.

WASHINGTON IRVING, *Bracebridge Hall*

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## *Long Fathoms Down*

*The golden dancers lie long fathoms down*
*Beneath a sea which cheats the world of beauty.*
*Bold in the sky, the arrows of the dawn*
*Beat on the whitening sea and beat in vain.*

*Locked in their coral tombs, Atlantan Kings*
*Out-last the rocks, determining the doom*
*Of each outlandish soul that sails above them,*
*And, as the shark, like an ungainly ghoul,*

*Snaps in green water, so in that dark kingdom*
*An ancient wisdom, perhaps jealously,*
*Pouches its silver from the curious diver*
*And teaches golden seekers they must die.*

JOHN BAYLISS

## *Miracle of Coral*

To savour the true miracle of coral, you must go to the outer edge of the reef. There, suspended by ropes from a small boat, you push yourself down, down along the living face of the majestic structure. Whereas the lagoon waters were delicate and sprinkled with sunlight, the brooding waters at the reef face are sullen and black. Below you, as far as the eye can penetrate, there is nothing but great chunks of mysterious forms jutting into the breaking sea. Sometimes the reef has broken away and left small caverns. Your hand explores one and draws back in terror! An octopus hides there. Then your eye becomes accustomed to the mournful darkness and you see about your face a myriad of brilliant fish.

You look in amazement, for never have you even guessed such creatures could exist. In every possible form and colour these astonishing fish drift by. When you think you have seen all the wonder a reef can hold, a monstrous coral fish goes past. It has a dozen silky tails, streamers from each fin, a face like a pig's, a striped body like a zebra's and such colours as no artist would dare combine. Off into the caverns it goes, and your eye lingers on a dark shape gliding through the mysterious waters. Was it a shark? It turns on its side and disappears. And always at your elbow the fantastic shapes of coral, the brilliant colours, the provocative textures. Above you the great surf pounds, and now your lungs throb with pain. You pull upon the rope and lunge toward the surface, up past the glorious fish, the murky caverns and the living coral. You break the waves and catch a comber full in the face. Exhausted, you climb back into the boat . . . You will never forget what you have seen.

JAMES A. MICHENER, *Return to Paradise*

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## *Song by the Sea*

*Girl of green waters, liquid as lies,*
*Cool as the calloused snow,*
*From my attic brain and prisoned eyes*
*Draw me and drown me now.*

*O suck me down to your weeds and fates,*
*Green, horizontal girl,*
*And in your salt-bright body breed*
*My death's dream-pointed pearl.*

*For locked alive in the brutal bone*
*I feel my lust of love*
*Rolling her porpoise thighs alone*
*Where the tropic channels move.*

*Her smooth mouth moons among the tides,*
*Sipping the milky fishes,*
*Her sallow shallow breasts pile up*
*Tight with my secret wishes.*

*Girl of green waters, liquid as light,*
*Beneath your skin of suns*
*My fright and frenzies lie asleep,*
*My deeds are skeletons.*

*So suck me down to your bed of sand,*
*Dilute my serpent blood,*
*Then lift the stain from my crimson hand*
*And sink it in your flood.*

LAURIE LEE

## *Apparition*

This morning, one of our companie looking over boord saw a mermaid, and calling up some of the companie to see her, one more came up, and by that time shee was come close to the ship's side, looking earnestly on the men; a little after, a sea came and overturned her: from the navill upward, her backe and breasts were like a woman's, as they say that saw her; her body as big as one of us; her skin very white; and long haire hanging downe behinde, of colour black: in her going down they saw her tayle, which was like the tayle of a porposse, and speckled like a macrell.

*A Second Voyage or Employment of Master Henry Hudson*

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# TIGER BAIT

**"It takes more than a tiger to make my little heart go pit-a-pat," said Finigan**

## by DAVID WALKER

THEY were sitting on the verandah of the Forest Resthouse, and it was a little before sunset in Northern India, where winter is crisp perfection. There were four of them : Graham Parsons and Claudia; Penelope their daughter; Terence Coombe her fiancé, an Englishman from Calcutta.

"To think we might have gone back to America without doing this," Graham said. "I'm certainly glad you persuaded us, Terence."

The jungle was quiet around them in the Siwalik foothills. Down to the north was the plain of the Doon, splashed golden, splashed green with winter crops. Beyond were the abrupt beginnings of the Himalayas, a six-thousand-foot rampart. Far away, the high snows which stretched coldly, remotely, over the roof of the world. This was the fleeting hour when day deepened into night. You could see it anywhere in India ; you could feel it in the jungle.

"Here's somebody in a hurry," Terence said.

It was a truck on the dirt road. It turned into the compound and came up very fast. There were two men ; they got out.

"Heavens ! " said Claudia. "It's Marcus Finigan. Remember him in Simla last summer, Penelope ? "

Penelope laughed. She did not have time to answer before Finigan burst like a bomb upon them.

"Is it really you, Claudia ? " he called. "Now isn't that the greatest stroke of luck after these weary months ? And Penelope, too, a lovely chip off a lovely block if ever there was one. We heard rumours in Delhi. We heard a whisper on the bush telegraph you were here, so I just said to Hanut—this is Colonel Hanut Singh—I said, 'We'll stop off a minute, Hanut, and see if what is still what.' "

After this verbal cyclone, Finigan shook hands gravely. He had not met the two men before. He was a large masculine type with pale blue eyes, black hair and a luxuriant moustache. He wore khaki shirt and shorts, and a pair of soft rubber shoes.

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To Terence Coombe he said: "I congratulate you, Mr. Coombe, on your good fortune. Such a heavenly prize does not come to every man."

Terence stiffened slightly. Graham Parsons smiled. "Won't you have a drink?"

"Whisky, sir," Finigan said. "Whisky is my tipple." He poured himself a large drink. "I hear the trade agreement is all signed up," he said. "You deserve a holiday."

"I guess I do after a year of it," said Parsons. "But I feel a new man since yesterday."

"Well, the jungle is the place." They sat and watched the snow take on the pink glow of another world.

"This is famous tiger country," Finigan said after a while. "Have you shikaris laid on?"

"Terence is doing all that," Penelope said. "He's an expert. He's shot six tigers."

"Indeed now," said Finigan respectfully. "Whereabouts, Mr. Coombe?"

"In Bengal. You see, I work in Calcutta. I got my last one on foot near Jalpaiguri." Terence was ordinarily the least boastful of people. Claudia could see he did not like Marcus. He said stiffly, "Have you shot tiger?"

"Oh, yes," Finigan said. "I've tried my hand at it now and then." His left eyelid just drooped at Hanut Singh.

Hanut smiled. "Tell us how many, Marcus?"

"When I was young, my little Irish mother, bless her heart, she used to say to me: 'Be a modest boy, Marcus. Whatever else you forget, never forget the Finigans are modest people.' Did your little Rajput mother tell you to be a modest boy, Hanut?"

Hanut Singh laughed. "I can't remember."

"Well, modestly speaking, the number is ninety-three," Finigan said. "And the thrill isn't what it used to be."

"I didn't know you were *that* Finigan," said Terence. Admiration and a not unreasonable resentment struggled in his face.

"The very same," Finigan said. "And just on my way to try for number ninety-four. They call him the maneater of Timli, and he killed fifty miles from here yesterday. Well, I have to drop my passenger at Dehra Dun, and then I'll see what I can do about the tiger. Who knows I mightn't drop over to see you one day? Ah! Listen to that!"

It was a tiger roaring down in the jungle. A deep reverberating "roomfph" of mastery. It rolled around the dusk and died.

"Isn't that the finest sound in the world? Do you wonder I had claustrophobia the time I went home? A pretty little bit of a country like Ireland! Well, come on, Hanut; we'd better be going

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before a tiger gobbles us up in the dark jungle. Thanks for the kind hospitality. I hope you get that fellow, Mr. Parsons."

A week later Finigan arrived unannounced. Claudia was having breakfast alone on the verandah. She looked as good to him as she always looked—forty-one with a grown-up daughter.

"Heavens!" she said. "You're like a wild man of Borneo. Don't you wear shoes? And don't you even button your shirt on cold mornings?"

"I'm a tough little fellow," Finigan said. "I'll have four eggs and bacon please. Why all on your lonesome?"

"Terence and Penelope are going on a round of inspection of the tethered animals. Poor Graham shot a tigress two days ago, and then he fell out of the tree and sprained his ankle badly, of all things. Come and see him."

Graham Parsons was in bed.

"I'm glad about the tigress, and sad about the ankle," Finigan said. "What happened?"

"I was completely het up, was what happened. How about you?"

"I nearly caught up with that tiger last week after his two hundred and eighth victim, which was an old woman collecting sticks. I sat beside the remains—very messy. But he never came all the long night, blast him for his cunning. He circled me three times, did the maneater of Timli, him with a big scar on his left forepaw which should make him the easiest thing in the jungle to track. Then he vanished, disappeared into thin air, which is what he always does and I'll tell you why.

"Most maneaters take to it because they're old and worn out so they can't kill fleet-footed game. But this boy—he's the exception. He learned the taste from his bad old mum when he was a baby. He learned it with his mother's milk, begging your pardon, Claudia. So you know what he does when things get too hot? He ups and disappears into the jungle to hunt fair for a bit. Then when it's quiet he slinks back for another bite of his favourite diet."

Claudia shuddered. "It's horrible," she said. "He might come here."

"He might come anywhere," said Finigan. "But this isn't deep enough jungle. He'll go far away off for a month, the good Lord knows where, because he travels hard ground on those excursions; and never a trace! Then he'll turn up again. But I'll get him in the end if it isn't the other way round; and what a disappointment a whiskyfied morsel like me would be to a gourmet tiger."

"Tell me," Parsons said. "Do you get excited any more?

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Does your heart ever thump like mine did when I saw that tigress come from nowhere ? "

Finigan shook his black head. " I used to," he said without bravado. " I used to get as excited as a bride at the cutting of the cake. But not now. It's my business and I love it. It takes more than a tiger to make my little heart go pit-a-pat." He glanced coyly at Claudia.

Parsons laughed. " You make me feel better," he said.

" I have a small matter of business to attend to in Bareilly. So I dropped in on my—" But Finigan stopped. A single shot had rung out.

" Ho, ho ! " he said. " Not so far away."

" Shall we go and see what's happened ? " said Claudia anxiously. " I get so nervous about Penelope."

" Wouldn't find them in that broken country," Finigan said. " Don't worry. One shot's a good sign always."

They went on to the verandah. Parsons hobbled along too. Finigan listened for sounds, but there were none. He ate up his eggs and drank coffee, talking idly, and thinking idly that this American Claudia Parsons must have plenty of composure to chat about other things if she was worrying about her only daughter in the jungle.

" Here's the shikari ! " she cried suddenly, her hand to her throat.

The man was running up the jungle path, across the grass. He had lost his puggree, and the long Hindu lock of hair bounced up and down at the crown of his head. His face was bleeding. His spindle-shanked legs flagged. He was exhausted or terrified or both ; but he recognized Finigan.

" Finigan sahib ! " he gasped, and went into a torrent of jumbled words.

" Shut up ! " said Finigan venomously. " Now sit, and speak slowly, Bhagat Ram, thou thrice misbegotten son of a cowardly owl."

The brutality did the trick. Bhagat Ram panted and told his story in the warm sunlight.

" They're all right," Finigan said. " Go on, brother ! " This gently enough.

" Right ! That'll do." He turned to them. " I know the place well. It's the head of a ravine. It's a circular hollow below cliffs, a gully above and just the one narrow exit downhill. Coombe tied up there last night ; and not a bad spot either, because there's a water-hole. Well, they walked up the ravine to this wide place, and Bhagat stopped at the entrance because he thought he saw foot-prints in soft sand, but the others went on towards the top to have a

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look at the young buffalo. They were only half-way across when the tiger charged out of long grass.

" Coombe fired once and hit him, Bhagat says, before the brute rocketed past, smashed the rifle out of his hand—broke it in half—saw Bhagat at the ravine, swerved off into cover on the other side. Terence and Penelope climbed a rock in the middle, where I imagine they're safe enough if they keep still ; but they can't get out of the place. Bhagat's a good chap, plenty of guts. He got those scratches running back through thorn jungle."

" I thought tigers never charged unless they were wounded," said Graham Parsons. He and Claudia were pale.

" Not in open country. Corner them and what do you expect ? That young man's an idiot to take Penelope in there. Well, Finigan to the rescue. So much for my day's business in Bareilly, so much for five hundred rupees." He was already at the truck, pulling his rifle from its cover.

" I'll come with you," Graham said.

" No," said Finigan. " I'll have enough to think of without a lame man on my hands. Have you another rifle ? "

" Yes. A three-five-six single barrel."

" Get it."

" Let me come," said Claudia.

He eyed her for a second. " Can you drive ? "

" Yes."

" Will you do exactly what I tell you ? "

She nodded. Her eyes and mouth were steady. She was all right.

" Come on, then."

" Oh, damnation ! " said Parsons. He watched them go.

Finigan drove fast—along a jungle track, over the white stones of a dry watercourse. " Good for the liver," he remarked. He had said they were safe, and he thought they would be safe if they kept still ; but a cornered tiger would do anything, and a cornered, wounded tiger . . . !

Claudia was quiet until she said, " You love this, don't you, Marcus ? "

" It warms me up," he said. " But the old pulse is steady. Here, feel ! " He held over his right wrist. He did it partly to boast and partly to keep her mind occupied.

" Like a funeral march," she said. " I thought your Irish mother told you to be modest. Do you think they're all right ? "

" Of course they are." He turned left into a watercourse, and they jolted over stones.

" Modesty never took a man far in the jungle. Caution, yes.

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Humility, yes. Modesty, no. My old mum didn't know where I was going."

"This is a very small rifle," she said. She was holding his and the other between her knees.

"Yes," said Finigan. "A two-forty. Very light and handy and a flat trajectory to two hundred. It's all right for a crack shot."

There was jungle on both sides until the watercourse narrowed between red rocks. Finigan stopped. He wondered. He just wondered. "One second," he said.

He got out and went over to the damp sandy patch he knew of. It might have passed this way, although Bhagat Ram had seen no clear tracks.

The tiger had passed this way. There was one fresh footprint. It was the forepaw of a very big tiger—six inches across, a perfect print. Finigan went back to the truck. "I'm going to walk now. Follow at ten feet. O.K.?"

"O.K.," Claudia said, moving over. She followed in low gear.

He carried the little rifle in his left hand, and he walked up the centre of the winding gully. The rock sides were vertical. Finigan's bare feet picked their way delicately, tentatively over white, rounded stones. He walked loosely, nonchalantly, slowly—not a big man stalking, but a big man strolling perfectly upright.

*Thank God he's here*, Claudia thought. A small bird burst from a thorn bush at the side, and that sent her heart pounding. But Finigan did not even turn his head.

He stopped at a bend; she stopped. He went on. She followed, and suddenly she saw the opening. The cliff walls swung wide in a circle, closed, or almost closed at the far end: a glimpse of brown grass and dusty scrub on either side, sand and stones in the middle, and a rock. Yes, a high rock where Penelope and Terence sat quite still, looking down here. Safe.

Finigan motioned her up to him, stepped back, rifle still in one hand, legs apart, rising and falling, up and back, up and back, on the balls of his bare feet. He did not look at her.

"Stop the engine." She switched it off, and now there was dead silence until his voice murmured in her ear: "Give me the rifle." She passed the other rifle to him, and he slung it over his head, across his left shoulder.

"Now climb that cliff on the left. Up high and sit quiet."

"Let me come with you."

One cold glance from pale eyes in a face burned dark as an Indian peasant's face. "Do as I tell you."

She did as he told her. She scrambled up broken rock and sat as quiet as a mouse, looking down at the brown amphitheatre, seeing the whole picture in a moment—young water buffalo still alive at the

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far end beside a puddle of water, straining stiff-legged, terrified at its rope ; Penelope and Terence together on a rock, not a safe rock ; brown grass and dusty green bushes on the left side and the right side ; below her, the rusty truck inside the entrance of the ravine ; below her, Marcus Finigan.

" He's down your end," called Terence. His voice was calm. " But I can't see him."

Finigan shook his fist savagely.

Terence was silent. Finigan moved. He had almost emerged from the narrow cleft of the ravine, was just emerging when the tiger broke. It charged silently out of the long grass, and along a rock ledge above Finigan's head. It was making straight for him. It was the most baleful, solid, enormous creature Claudia had ever seen—tawny red, thick at the neck, horrible and wonderful.

Even as Finigan jumped towards the tiger, in under the red rock face, his rifle was in two hands, his back to the wall. The tiger landed within ten feet of him, like a giant dog, not a cat ; saw the truck ; turned back, snarling ; galloped across the sand and jumped up into the grass it had come from. Finigan's rifle followed it until the rock cut him off, but he did not shoot.

" Right in the line of fire," he said with disgust, meaning Terence and Penelope. He examined blood marks in the sand. " Wounded ! " he muttered. " Scratched with a toothpick ! "

Finigan walked slowly across open ground, looking over towards the tiger. It growled once—a long rumbling growl. It was out of sight.

He reached the rock where the others sat. " Come down here, Coombe," he said. Then : " Lift the rifle over my head."

Claudia could hear him clearly. It was a quiet, deliberate voice. He never took his eyes off the patch of grass and scrub. " Climb up again." Terence climbed. Finigan followed him. " Hello, Penelope, my love," he said. " I'll get you back for breakfast in less than no time." He patted her shoulder. She smiled up at him.

" Now, listen to me, Coombe. You've committed enough foolishness for one morning ; so listen ! That tiger is as good as new —a flesh wound at most, and there's no good waiting for him to stiffen. I'm going after him now. You stay here.

" You can fire in two circumstances : one, if he charges directly this way ; two, if he tries to break down past the car ; in which case for heaven's sake be careful of Claudia. Whatever else the tiger does, or whatever you see me do, don't fire. I don't want to say any Good-bye Charlies with one of your bullets in my back. Clear ? "

" Yes," said Terence, accepting the rocket. He knew he should not have brought Penelope into this place. " But why don't you go round and get him from the top of the cliff ? "

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" Because I'd never see him in that cover."

Finigan thought it over quickly again. This rock where he stood with Terence and Penelope was only ten feet high, by no means safe. But the chap had a rifle again now, and he seemed cool enough. Yes, that was all right. Claudia was perched twenty feet up the cliff face. That was safe unless with a very bad tiger.

" Claudia ! " he said in the same tone of voice. " Move ten feet higher and keep out of sight."

She did so, climbing with difficulty.

Finigan looked at the place where the tiger lay. He could see it well from up here. It was a segment of a rough circle, perhaps fifty yards long, less than thirty across. At the far side, against the circle of cliff, was scrub ; at the near side, long grass ; between the two, a strip of bare ground. But over on the right, scrub and grass joined. It was there that the tiger had tried to break before. The truck was no real obstacle ; the next time he would jump it.

" Well, here we go, boys and girls," said Finigan. " Off for a buggy ride."

He went down quietly, walked across. He stopped in the open, bent to pick up sizeable stones, had three in his right hand ; lobbed the first—it fell with a thud, nothing doing ; lobbed the second—it clattered on rock ; nothing doing ; lobbed the third—it struck a branch, nothing doing. He bent for more. They were good round pebbles the size of eggs ; big enough to sting, to provoke, to elicit response.

Finigan searched deliberately. He scored a direct hit at the seventh throw—a different thud, a woof of anger ! He dropped the other stones, and the small two-forty was in both hands. He listened, but no movement ; tried again, a poor shot : tried again, got him ! The maneater skulked in the identical place where he was before and where Finigan had expected him to be—in the strip of scrub close to the cliff. So far, so good.

" Boo ! " called Finigan. But the tiger did not reply, and it did not charge ; which was a pity, because here in the open would be best. " Boo ! " he called again. No response.

Finigan thought : He's most likely to break down the ravine, so I'll come up from that direction to the bare strip between grass and scrub. Then I'll make the *something* charge me. I will, I will. But it's a nasty game and a nasty place and a nasty tiger.

He moved down to the right as quiet as quiet, and he heard some monkey chatter. *Go away, monkeys, spoiling my ears.* He heard a coppersmith, tonk, tonk, tonk, that small green bird hammering all day. He flicked one glance over to Claudia. She had disobeyed orders. She was not hidden, but sat in the open, elbows on knees,

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hands cupping face. *There's a woman*, he thought. Claudia sat as if she were watching a game. He signalled with his right hand to her to get out of sight, but she did not move.

Finigan climbed the low bank, was in the grass. It came up to his shoulders. He listened—no growl, no rustle, no breath; only monkeys up beyond the cliff, and the incessant coppersmith.

He moved in—one, two, three, four, five, six tortoise steps; stopped. Nothing. Turned left—ten paces to go to the open strip. It was not healthy here; it was objectionable; but the tiger was over in the scrub, and clear ground between.

As Finigan moved again, he felt the tingle in his neck. It was his warning bell, the bell that said, *Who stalks whom?* It had rung many times, but never more urgently than now in tall brown grass.

"On your right, Marcus!" Claudia's contralto—a musical voice from the state of Virginia. He heard that, and heard a rustle, and saw the grass-tops sway and part and close as the tiger crawled towards him from the right.

The tiger had changed position. It was a bad tiger. He knew it was a very bad tiger, and when he told them his pulse never quickened, that wasn't a fib, but it was not quite true in every circumstance.

Finigan went on exactly as he had been going, which was very slowly towards open ground. If he ran, the tiger would charge as sure as onions. If he prowled, the tiger might prowl; might. *You fool*, he thought. *Still a fool, after ninety-three, not to wait and try again after the monkeys were quiet.*

Five paces, six paces, seven paces, and the grass swayed and parted and closed always a little nearer him. Two paces to go.

Finigan sprinted across hard dry earth. He had done the hundred yards in ten seconds once when he was young, and he did the equivalent for a short spurt now, twenty years later, with a different heel-jarring finish as he turned to face the tiger which could do the hundred after a lovely roar in five seconds, not ten; and it was only a few yards, not a hundred.

Another shot, which cracked out just before Finigan plugged the tiger neatly between the eyes, hit sideways. The head went down, the quarters came over like a shot rabbit smack on to the hard ground where he had been, and contorted in one more complete somersault. The legs thrashed. The tiger was dead.

Finigan was relieved, and also very angry. "Didn't I tell you not to fire, you young idiot?" he bellowed.

"I thought he had you," said Coombe. "So I fired. Hit him too." He did not sound penitent.

Finigan looked the tiger over. Yes, Coombe had hit it in the

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heart—a very fine galloping shot. One in the heart, one in the brain, one surface gouge along the back. It was a big tiger, nine foot or more, with forelegs as thick as a man's thigh.

"I'll get the truck," he said.

"It was wonderful, Marcus," said Claudia. "I can't thank you. But what a terrible risk to take, drawing the tiger on like that. Did you mean to?"

"Not in long grass," he said, which was the truth, and he would not have told it to many people.

He drove up, tied a hitch round the tiger, hauled it to the edge of the grass. Then he and Coombe toppled the beast into the back of the truck.

"Well," he said, thumping his chest. He glanced casually at Terence. "I believe I'll remember the ninety-fourth."

Coombe opened his mouth, closed it, and said, "First blood, and a heart shot. You took the risk, of course, I admit. But the custom—"

"I tell you what," said Finigan. "We'll stretch a point and both count it, and I'll take the tiger along to the best taxidermist in all India and send you the mounted skin as a wedding present, as a hearthrug for your happy nest. How's that?"

"Fair enough," Coombe said. He laughed. "If you don't forget."

"I never broke a promise yet that I could remember," said Finigan. He advanced on Penelope. "Claudia and I will drive back. I know you two would like to be together after all that excitement. So good-bye, Penelope. I think you've got yourself not a bad husband, even if he is an Englishman."

"Thanks a million, Marcus," she said. "You're terrific."

"Good-bye, Terence. Don't go taking this valuable package into a cul-de-sac again, not after tiger; if you'll forgive me for offering humble advice."

"But I still don't understand why the brute charged us that first time," said Terence. "It's against all the rules."

"The tiger's a gentleman mostly," Finigan said. "So you learn all the rules; then you learn a last one—that he breaks every rule sooner or later. Here's me giving lectures. But I must hurry."

They bumped slowly down the ravine. "They're apt to be a bit tangy at close quarters," he remarked.

"Tangy is an understatement." Claudia held a handkerchief to her nose. "Tell me, Marcus. Was that just routine, or would you call it a close shave?"

"I would call it a close shave."

"The closest ever?"

He put his large fist over her hand. "Bless your heart, no,

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Claudia. I've been to grips with them before now. One time me and a tiger went for a roll down the cliff. I had to knife that boy." He tapped the sheathed hunting-knife at his waist. "Here's what he did to me."

Before she could object, Finigan had pulled the shirt clean off his right shoulder. It was a muscular shoulder; deep parallel scars ran down his back out of sight. "Claws," he said.

Claudia shuddered.

"Don't you like my pretty shoulder?" Finigan turned on to the jungle track.

"You're an awful man," she said, and laughed.

"Now, I suppose I am awful," said Finigan. "It depends on which way you happen to look at me."

Which Claudia knew to be true, and she sensed danger, not undesirable; and she would welcome the sight of her civilized husband.

"Where are you going next?" she asked, to dispel the electric atmosphere which had come suddenly from nowhere.

"It's too late now for me to get to Bareilly. That villain, blast his soul, he owes me five hundred, and I heard he's skedaddling on the two-o'clock train. Ah, well, it can't be helped."

"Marcus!" she said. "I know Graham wouldn't hear of—you must let us make up the money."

"I'd do anything in the world for you, Claudia, free, gratis and for nothing, and I hope you know it." He gave her a sidelong glance. "So I don't like to—but well, if you insist."

"I do insist," she said. Then: "I suppose in a week or two you'll start after the maneater again?"

Finigan shrugged. "You never know where they'll turn up," he said. "You never know what'll happen in this dark world of sin. But one thing's certain—that you'll be home in America next month, and I'll never see you again, and you'll forget all about an awful man called Marcus Finigan."

"Does anybody ever forget you?" she said as they drove up to the resthouse. Graham Parsons hovered on the verandah. "It's all right, darling," Claudia called.

"Good heavens," he said, looking down. "Some animal!"

Claudia went up the steps, said something to him, and he limped off with her. Finigan roped the tiger firmly in place.

"I can't tell you how grateful I am," said Graham when they came back. Finigan accepted an envelope, but with reluctance. "I insist," Graham said. "She's our only daughter, after all."

"Well, a thousand thanks." Finigan shook hands. "You know," he said, not joking, "you're the luckiest husband in all America.

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You wouldn't begrudge me a farewell kiss, would you ? "

Parsons laughed. " Don't ask me," he said.

Finigan grasped Claudia powerfully. It was a kiss.

" Go away at once," she said weakly afterwards. " Good-bye, Marcus."

He climbed into his rusty truck, turned to give the tiger a friendly pat on its flank, turned to them. " Me and my Teddy Bear," he said, and drove off.

Good manners did not permit him to look inside the envelope until he was out of sight ; the cheque was for a thousand rupees. " Mercy on us," he said.

Good sense had warned him not to imperil generosity, nor to encourage rival claims, by disclosing that the Maneater of Timli was tucked in safely behind, and the scarred forepaw incontrovertible proof. A reward of two thousand for that, making three in one day. Now there's a woman with a sense of humour, he thought. I'll tell them when I send the skin.

" Me and my Teddy Bear," Finigan sang happily. " Got no worries, got no care." This with variations all the way through his beloved jungle.

* * *

## *SONG OF SIXPENCE*

*Lordinges, I wol you singen of a grotë,*
*And of a pouche of reye also by rotë,*
*And eek of tweyë doseyn birdës blakë,*
*That weren in a pastee wel y-bakë :*
*So sonë thilkë pastee corven was,*
*Tho foulës al gan singen in that cas :*
*Me thinketh this so delicat it is ;*
*A ! kingës mowen ete of it, ywis !*

*The kingë to his contour-hous is goon,*
*To rekene of his peynes everichoon ;*
*With-in hir propre bour the quenë setë,*
*Of breed with hony spraddë for to etë :*
*And in the gardin was the lavender fresshë ;*
*Ther-in she hangeth clothës newe y-wesshë,*
*Til sodeynly doun fleight a papejay,*
*And plukked of hir nosë, weylaway !*

FRANK SIDGWICK

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# LAUGHING STRANGER

**"It's very lucky," said the man, "that a sheep cannot climb a tree"**

## by JAMES STEPHENS

IN the days of long ago and the times that have disappeared for ever, there was one Fiachna Finn the son of Baltan, the son of Murchertach, the son of Muredach, the son of Eogan, the son of Neill. He went from his own country when he was young, for he wished to see the land of Lochlann, and he wished that he would be welcomed by the king of that country, for Fiachna's father and Eolgarg's father had done deeds in common and were obliged to each other. He was welcomed, and he stayed at the Court of Lochlann in great ease and in the midst of pleasures.

It then happened that Eolgarg Mor fell sick and the doctors could not cure him. They sent for other doctors, but they could not cure him, nor could any one say what he was suffering from, beyond that he was wasting visibly before their eyes, and would certainly become a shadow and disappear in air unless he was healed and fattened and made visible.

They sent for more distant doctors, and then for others more distant still, and at last they found a man who claimed that he could make a cure if the king were supplied with the medicine which he would order.

"What medicine is that?" said they all.

"This is the medicine," said the doctor. "Find a perfectly white cow with red ears, and boil it down in the lump, and if the king drinks that rendering he will recover."

Before he had well said it messengers were going from the palace in all directions looking for such a cow. They found lots of cows which were nearly like what they wanted, but it was only by chance that they came on the cow which would do the work, and that beast belonged to the most notorious and malicious and cantankerous female in Lochlann, the Black Hag.

Now the Black Hag was not only those things that have been said; she was whiskered and warty and one-eyed and obstreperous, and she was notorious and ill-favoured in other ways also.

They offered her a cow in the place of her own cow, but she refused to give it. Then they offered a cow for each leg of her cow,

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but she would not accept that offer unless Fiachna went bail for the payment. He agreed to do so, and they drove the beast away.

On the return journey he was met by messengers who brought news from Ireland. They said that the King of Ulster was dead, and that he, Fiachna Finn, had been elected king in the dead king's place. He at once took ship for Ireland, and found that all he had been told was true, and he took up the government of Ulster.

A year passed, and one day as he was sitting at judgment there came a great noise from without, and this noise was so persistent that the people and suitors were scandalized, and Fiachna at last ordered that the noisy person should be brought before him to be judged. It was done, and to his surprise the person turned out to be the Black Hag.

She blamed him in the court before his people and complained that he had taken away her cow, and that she had not been paid the four cows he had gone bail for, and she demanded judgment from him and justice.

"If you will consider it to be justice, I will give you twenty cows myself," said Fiachna.

"I will not take all the cows in Ulster," she screamed.

"Pronounce judgment yourself," said the king, "and if I can do what you demand I will do it." For he did not like to be in the wrong, and he did not wish that any person should have an unsatisfied claim upon him.

The Black Hag then pronounced judgment, and the king had to fulfil it.

"I have come," said she, "from the east to the west; you must come from the west to the east and make war for me, and revenge me on the King of Lochlann."

Fiachna had to do as she demanded, and, although it was with a heavy heart, he set out in three days' time for Lochlann, and he brought with him ten battalions.

He sent messengers before him to Big Eolgarg warning him of his coming, of his intention, and of the number of troops he was bringing; and when he landed Eolgarg met him with an equal force, and they fought together.

In the first battle three hundred of the men of Lochlann were killed, but in the next battle Eolgarg Mor did not fight fair, for he let some venomous sheep out of a tent, and these attacked the men of Ulster and killed nine hundred of them.

So vast was the slaughter made by these sheep and so great the terror they caused, that no one could stand before them, but by great good luck there was a wood at hand, and the men of Ulster, warriors and princes and charioteers, were forced to climb up the

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trees, and they roosted among the branches like great birds, while the venomous sheep ranged below, bleating terribly and tearing up the ground.

Fiachna Finn was also sitting in a tree, very high up, and he was disconsolate. "We are disgraced!" said he.

"It is very lucky," said the man in the branch below, "that a sheep cannot climb a tree."

"We are disgraced for ever!" said the King of Ulster.

"If those sheep learn how to climb, we are undone surely," said the man below.

"I will go down and fight the sheep," said Fiachna.

But the others would not let the king go.

"It is not right," they said, "that you should fight sheep."

"Some one must fight them," said Fiachna Finn, "but no more of my men shall die until I fight myself; for if I am fated to die, I will die and I cannot escape it, and if it is the sheep's fate to die, then die they will; for there is no man can avoid destiny, and there is no sheep can dodge it either."

"Praise be to God!" said the warrior that was higher up.

"Amen!" said the man who was higher than he, and the rest of the warriors wished good luck to the king.

He started then to climb down the tree with a heavy heart, but while he hung from the last branch and was about to let go, he noticed a tall warrior walking towards him. The king pulled himself up on the branch again and sat dangle-legged on it to see what the warrior would do.

The stranger was a very tall man, dressed in a green cloak with a silver brooch at the shoulder. He had a golden band about his hair and golden sandals on his feet, and he was laughing heartily at the plight of the men of Ireland.

"It is not nice of you to laugh at us," said Fiachna Finn.

"Who could help laughing at a king hunkering on a branch and his army roosting around like hens?" said the stranger.

"Nevertheless," the king replied, "it would be courteous of you not to laugh at misfortune."

"We laugh when we can," commented the stranger, "and are thankful for the chance."

"You may come up into the tree," said Fiachna, "for I perceive that you are a mannerly person, and I see that some of the venomous sheep are charging in this direction. I would rather protect you," he continued, "than see you killed; for," said he lamentably, "I am getting down now to fight the sheep."

"They will not hurt me," said the stranger.

"Who are you?" the king asked.

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" I am Manannan, the son of Lir."

Fiachna knew then that the stranger could not be hurt.

" What will you give me if I deliver you from the sheep ? " asked Manannan.

" I will give you anything you ask, if I have that thing."

" I ask the rights of your crown and of your household for one day."

Fiachna's breath was taken away by that request, and he took a little time to compose himself, then he said mildly :

" I will not have one man of Ireland killed if I can save him. All that I have they give me, all that I have I give to them, and if I must give this also, then I will give this, although it would be easier for me to give my life."

" That is agreed," said Manannan.

He had something wrapped in a fold of his cloak, and he unwrapped and produced this thing.

It was a dog.

Now if the sheep were venomous, this dog was more venomous still, for it was fearful to look at. In body it was not large, but its head was of a great size, and the mouth that was shaped in that head was able to open like the lid of a pot. It was not teeth that were in that head, but hooks and fangs and prongs. Dreadful was that mouth to look at, terrible to look into, woeful to think about ; and from it, or from the broad, loose nose that waggled above it, there came a sound which no word of man could describe, for it was not a snarl, nor was it a howl, although it was both of these.

It was neither a growl nor a grunt, although it was both of these ; it was not a yowl nor a groan, although it was both of these : for it was one sound made up of these sounds, and there was in it, too, a whine and a yelp, and a long-drawn snoring noise, and a deep purring noise, and a noise that was like the squeal of a rusty hinge, and there were other noises in it also.

" The gods be praised ! " said the man who was in the branch above the king.

" What for this time ? " said the king.

" Because that dog cannot climb a tree," said the man.

And a man on a branch yet above him groaned out, " Amen ! "

" There is nothing to frighten sheep like a dog," said Manannan, " and there is nothing to frighten these sheep like this dog."

He put the dog on the ground then.

" Little dogeen, little treasure," he said, " go and kill the sheep."

And when he said that the dog put an addition and an addendum on to the noise he had been making before, so that the men of Ireland stuck their fingers into their ears and turned the whites

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of their eyes upwards, and nearly fell off their branches with the fear and the fright which that sound put into them.

It did not take the dog long to do what he had been ordered. He went forward, at first, with a slow waddle, and as the venomous sheep came to meet him in bounces, he then went to meet them in wriggles; so that in a while he went so fast that you could see nothing of him but a head and a wriggle. He dealt with the sheep in this way, a jump and a chop for each, and he never missed his jump and he never missed his chop. When he got his grip he swung round on it as if it was a hinge. The swing began with the chop, and it ended with the bit loose and the sheep giving its last kick. At the end of ten minutes all the sheep were lying on the ground, and the same bit was out of every sheep, and every sheep was dead.

"You can come down now," said Manannan.

"That dog can't climb a tree," said the man in the branch above the king warningly.

"Praise be to the gods!" said the man who was above him.

"Amen!" said the warrior who was higher up than that.

And the man in the next tree said: "Don't move a hand or a foot until the dog chokes himself to death on the dead meat."

The dog did not eat a bit of the meat. He trotted to his master, and Manannan took him up and wrapped him in his cloak.

"Now you can come down," said he.

"I wish that dog was dead," said the king.

But he swung himself out of the tree all the same, for he did not wish to seem frightened before Manannan.

"You can go now and beat the men of Lochlann," said Manannan. "You will be King of Lochlann before nightfall."

"I wouldn't mind that," said the king.

"It's no threat," said Manannan.

The son of Lir turned then and went away in the direction of Ireland to take up his one-day rights, and Fiachna continued his battle with the Lochlannachs.

He beat them before nightfall, and by that victory he became King of Lochlann and King of the Saxons and the Britons.

He gave the Black Hag seven castles with their territories, and he gave her one hundred of every sort of cattle that he had captured. She was satisfied.

Then he went back to Ireland, and after he had been there for some time his wife gave birth to a son.

* * *

*The three most egocentric words of all are—"I love you."*

WILLIAM SANSOM

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# DAUGHTERS OF EVE

**There's love the whole world over**
**Wherever you may be . . .**

W. H. AUDEN

*In the Ch'in country lives Miss Lo Fu ;*
*She plucks mulberry leaves beside green waters,*
*Her white hand stretches out to touch the green leaves,*
*Her make-up is freshly put on.*
*" My silkworms are starving," she says, " I must be off."*
*Do not halt your five horses to linger here.*

LI PO, *Songs of the Four Seasons, translated by* SOAME JENYNS

## *Lion-Hearted*

When an Englishman is in love he is capable of anything.

HIPPOLYTE TAINE, *Notes on England*, 1872

## *Lady of Spain*

*Your lips are red, your eyes are green !*
*Why do you hide behind your bars ?*
*Who, in your cloak of mazarine,*
*Embroidered with its crop of stars,*
*Should walk each honey-coloured square*
*And feel the fountain's murmured kiss*
*Where water, softer than a prayer,*
*Speaks with conspiratorial hiss ?*

ROB LYLE

## *Indian Interlude*

There was light enough to show him—in the corner opposite—a girl lying asleep, or rather only half asleep, for she had been disturbed by his forcing of the door. Still, as it seemed, in a dream she lay there, but her eyes were open and staring. His entry, to all appearances, moved her no more than this : that she lifted her lids to stare at him with wonder.

For his part, Hari stared, and there was no further movement on either side, until, leaning back against the doorpost, he gave her a smile and good day.

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That smile lingered on during a further interval of complete silence. She was so lovely, this girl, that while his eyes rested upon her he could not help smiling for pleasure. The freshness of childhood was still hers ; what her last year had added was softness and bloom and a depth of luminous secrecy behind the eyes—those eyes that veiled—and in doing so betrayed—a consciousness of sex and beauty. As now she moved into a sitting posture, her light garment falling away, revealed a perfect neck and shoulders. At this she looked down and away, but made no other movement, and still she said nothing . . .

Hari came up to her, grasped her beautiful arm and drew her to her feet. At the touch of his hand she at once became self-conscious, cast down her eyes and bent her head. He stood over her, very close.

" Lovely one, what is your name ? " he murmured.

She put her beads up to her lips, and although her face remained hidden he could guess that she was regaining confidence. This was the kind of approach she knew best how to meet.

" Tell me, what is there to prevent me . . . in such a lonely place . . . from plucking this Flower of Delight ? "

Her silence gave him his answer.

L. H. MYERS, *The Root and the Flower*

## *Homage to Texas*

*It's hardly wise to generalize*
*About a state or city ;*
*But Texan girls are decent girls*
*And bold as they are pretty.*

*Who dared the outrageous unicorn*
*Through lonely woods a-leaping ?*
*Who made him halt and lower his horn*
*And couch beside her, weeping ?*

*Not Helen (wonder of her sex)*
*Nor Artemis, nor Pallas ;*
*No, sir : a girl from Houston, Tex.,*
*Though some claim it was Dallas.*

*He told her : " Ma'am, your Lone Star State,*
*Though maybe short on schooling,*
*Outshines the whole bright forty-eight "—*
*And so it did, no fooling.*

ROBERT GRAVES, *Poems and Satires* 1951

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## *Better in France*

Emma turned down a street; she recognized him by his curling hair that escaped from beneath his hat.

Léon walked along the pavement. She followed him to the hotel. He went up, opened the door, entered—what an embrace!

Then, after the kisses, the words gushed forth. They told each other the sorrows of the week, the presentiments, the anxiety for the letters; but now everything was forgotten; they gazed into each other's faces with voluptuous laughs and tender names.

The bed was large, of mahogany, in the shape of a boat. The curtains were in red levantine, that hung from the ceiling and bulged out only just before they reached the wide bed-head; and nothing in the world was so lovely as her brown head and white skin standing out against this purple colour, when, with a movement of shame, she crossed her bare arms, hiding her face in her hands.

The warm room, with its discreet carpet, its gay ornaments, and its calm light, seemed made for the intimacies of passion . . . They were so completely lost in the possession of each other that they thought themselves in their own house, and that they would live there till death, like two spouses eternally young. They said "our room," "our carpet," she even said "my slippers," a gift of Léon's, a whim she had had. They were pink satin, bordered with swansdown. When she sat on his knees, her leg, then too short, hung in the air, and the dainty shoe, that had no back to it, was held on only by the toes to her bare foot.

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT, *Madame Bovary*, *translated by* ELEANOR MARX AVELING

## *Irish Rose*

*Put your head, darling, darling, darling,*
*Your darling black head my heart above;*
*Oh, mouth of honey, with the thyme for fragrance,*
*Who, with heart in breast, could deny you love?*
*Oh, many and many a young girl for me is pining,*
*Letting her locks of gold to the cold wind free,*
*For me, the foremost of our gay young fellows;*
*But I'd leave a hundred, pure love, for thee!*
*Then put your head, darling, darling, darling,*
*Your darling black head my heart above;*
*Oh, mouth of honey, with the thyme for fragrance,*
*Who, with heart in breast, could deny you love?*

*Translated from the Irish by*
SAMUEL FERGUSON, 1810–1886

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# PURSUIT

**Now there was no longer any doubt. This was a chase for life or death**

## by DENYS VAL BAKER

I SAW him watching me in the wide mirror of the barber's saloon. He was a wiry, little man of about forty, with a round bullet-like head, going bald. He was drably dressed in baggy flannels and a faded brown jacket, with a mackintosh over one arm and a slouching trilby hat balanced on his knees. He seemed a subdued and insignificant figure, yet there was something disturbingly familiar about him. His face, which was rather ugly, with protruding front teeth and deep, unsightly eye-sockets, was not a stranger's face. Something about it provoked in me an odd feeling of impending surprise, of startled recognition-to-come. I felt I ought to have known his face immediately, but somehow it remained shadowy and indefinable—slightly, and worryingly, outside the focus of my understanding.

It was about four o'clock and I had dropped in for a shave on my way home from work. I was leaning back with my eyes half-closed, pretending to be immersed in an animated conversation with the barber, and I don't think the little man realized I had observed his interest.

I remembered that he had come into the barber's shop just behind me. I had taken the proffered shaving-chair, while he had taken off his hat and mackintosh and sat down on the bench for waiting customers. As far as I knew he had picked up one of the newspapers on the bench and started reading. It was only by chance, while the barber was filling the hot water mug from a can in the corner, that I happened to look in the mirror and see the little man staring across the room with bright, burning eyes.

With sudden uneasiness I realized his gaze was aimed specifically in my direction. It was not a casual, not a mildly curious gaze, but rather the fierce, almost wolfish gaze of a man who had suddenly set eyes on a prey for which he had long been seeking. The eyes seemed to burn into the mirror with a flame of consuming hatred. I felt a chill creep into my reclining body.

Of course, I was being quite ridiculous, I told myself, fighting hard against a tremendous desire to turn my head away and pretend it was all a dream. I was imagining things. In a moment or so, I

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would see the little man's eyes drift away and return in bored unconcern to their newspaper. But unfortunately, they did not. They remained instead fixed unwaveringly upon me; two pin-points of steely menace that bored into my very existence. They seemed to be alight with an evil flame, and they were growing brighter and brighter.

I stuck it for a while, wriggling uncomfortably in my seat and trying unsuccessfully to let the monotone of the barber's voice lull me into a sense of security. Then I felt the little man's gaze becoming fiercer, more impelling, and I began to get really perturbed.

"For God's sake, hurry up and finish!" I muttered to the barber out of the corner of my mouth, so that the little man wouldn't notice. I drummed my fingers nervously on the side of the chair while the barber, disgruntled, gave my face a hasty wipe with a towel, then roughly whisked off the cover sheet.

As I rose from the chair, I looked casually into the mirror. The eyes of the little man rose upwards with me, following my movements steadily. I couldn't be quite sure—his face was still blurred—but it seemed that a quick look of cunning flitted across his face, as if he were making some rapid decision to cope with the new problem created by my imminent departure.

For a moment I hesitated, wondering if he would rise and dutifully take the seat which the barber was now politely offering to him. Indeed, he *was* beginning to rise—but some flash of intuition warned me that he had no intention of taking the seat. I hastily thrust a coin into the barber's hand. "Keep the change!" I said hurriedly. Then I grabbed my mackintosh and hat and ran out of the shop, swinging the door back behind me viciously.

I didn't dare to look round, but I felt sure that the little man had come after me. I began walking down the street as fast as I could, without actually running, intent on finding some sort of hiding-place. When I came to a store on the corner I darted through the entrance. Inside, there was a thick crowd of shoppers: I threaded my way among them, burrowing deeper and deeper into the mass of sticky humanity.

When I reached the stationery counter at the far end of the shop I felt safer. Looking back I could see a jumble of housewives, old men and children, but no sign of the little man. I breathed more easily and began walking slowly up and down beside the counter. I felt a tempting sensation of relief stealing over me. It would be all right now. Probably the little man's view had been temporarily blocked at the particular moment I had stepped into the shop. He would have gone hurrying by. . . . I would give him a few minutes, then go outside and get a bus home.

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I began wandering from counter to counter, looking at the goods with idle curiosity. I passed from stationery to kitchenware, then to hardware, then back to stationery. Passing the hardware counter for the third time I felt the assistant eyeing me, and hastily picked up a coloured mixing bowl. " I'll take this," I said, smiling brightly at her. She took my silver and moved away to get change.

I found myself smiling into a long dirty mirror which lined the wall behind the counter. I went on smiling rather mechanically, then felt the grin slowly freeze across my face. Standing at the counter behind me I could see the little man, his slouch hat pulled down over his eyes, his mackintosh thrown untidily over his shoulder. He was pretending to examine a writing pad, but all the time his eyes were darting round the shop. Feeling like a hypnotized rabbit I stood there without moving and watched his gaze travel round until it alighted, abruptly, on me. For a moment we remained like two statues, then the little man started to move. I had an extraordinary feeling that he was going to vault over the counter towards me.

Crying out in sudden terror, I dropped the bowl on to the edge of the counter, breaking it into a dozen pieces, and started running down the aisle leading to the nearest exit. Behind me I heard the startled cry of the assistant; shoppers and other assistants turned a sea of surprised faces in my direction; but before they could make any move to stop me, I had plunged through an exit swing door. As I did so I fancied I caught a glimpse of the little man irritably pushing his way through a converging crowd of people.

Outside in the street again I felt bare and defenceless, like an animal caught in the open. Seeing another big store on the other side of the road I made a dash for it, skipping neatly across the path of a tram and passing smoothly through a revolving door. As I went in I looked across the road and saw the swing door bursting open, and I knew that he was after me.

This was one of the higher class stores, mostly clothing and drapery. The tall counters and drooping fabrics offered some excellent cover. I hurriedly skirted round the shop, keeping an occasional eye on the entrance to see if the little man would come in. Unfortunately, while doing this I backed into a precarious tower of rolled-up carpets and brought the whole lot tumbling down, spread-eagling me on the floor. Panic-stricken by sudden fear that the little man would come leaping down on me, I scrambled to my feet and started running away without waiting to repair the damage—taking with me a blurred vision of a shop-walker's plump, reddening face, convulsed with indignation. I went on,

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turning two or three corners, passing through the ladies' underwear and brassiere sections.

Then I began to wonder whether during my accident, the little man had entered the shop and was even now waiting for me behind some tall display stand. It would certainly be safer to transfer myself to some other floor.

Looking round I saw a convenient sign pointing: *Lifts.* I hurried along and, in luck's way, found the lift was waiting, the uniformed girl about to close the gates.

"Hey, wait!" I cried, running up. The girl smiled demurely and stepped aside. I went in and flopped on to a welcome bench. The girl called out: "Going up!" Some other passengers crowded in after me. Then she clanged the gate and the lift started rising.

Something made me take uneasy stock of my surroundings. My nearest neighbours were two faded old ladies, out for an afternoon's shopping. Next to them was a mother and her small girl. Beyond her . . . I caught a glimpse of the side of a man's face. There was something about it.

One of the old ladies turned, sweeping her wide-brimmed hat out of my line of vision. Then my heart nearly stopped beating. The little man was standing exactly opposite with only one or two women between us.

At the sight of me a ferocious grin split his face into an evil mask. His drawn-back lips seemed about to mouth fearful epithets. For the first time I realized how incomparably sinister a figure he was, how threatening was the whole of his hard, shrivelled-up, menacing presence. Now, indeed, there was no longer any room for doubt, no chance of pretending otherwise than that it was a chase for life or death.

My tongue parched in my mouth. I tried to utter words.

"Help!" I said. "Help!"

I thought I was crying out, but the words must have stuck in my throat.

"What floor did you say?" said the lift girl, looking at me.

I didn't reply. I just stared fascinatedly at the little man, and he stared back at me. I noticed he had a small unkempt moustache and a stubble of beard, and a sharp pointed nose. I suddenly thought of a miniature Mephistopheles. At any moment he would brush aside the old ladies with a wave of his hand.

"Third floor," said the lift girl unemotionally.

"Here, let me get out!" I cried wildly. With a terrific surge of strength I seized one of the old ladies round her waist and half-lifted, half-threw her into the path of the little man. Then I dived out of the lift, knocking the surprised lift girl against the side.

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Seeing some stairs running beside the lift-shaft I darted to them and began bounding down them two at a time. I heard someone call out after me: "He must be mad! Stop him!" It was probably the old lady. Or, more likely, the little fellow. He would be after me down the stairs like a terrier.

I beat him to the next exit, however. I flew out of that store even faster than I had left the previous one. This time I gave up all pretence and began running hell-for-leather down the street. I saw people staring at me, and a policeman raised his eyebrows, but I didn't care how much attention I aroused. I only wanted to get a long way away.

I ran the whole length of the main shopping street and then took a turning at random into a smaller, secondary street. I was puffing, it was some years since I had done any running. The trouble was my lunch was still a weight on me—it had been a good and a heavy one. I bitterly regretted my two mild and bitters. I could hear them swishing about inside me.

Looking back I couldn't see any sign of the little man, so I slackened my run to a panting walk. I wasn't fool enough to think I had given him the slip, but at least I had time to think and manœuvre. Although I could hear my heart beating with heavy thuds, I felt much cooler in the head. I remembered reading in detective stories that danger sharpened the brain. Well, something like that was happening to me.

It was high time I forgot all about how, three-quarters-of-an-hour ago, I had been walking home from work, as I had done for nineteen years, and how I'd thought it might be a good idea to have a shave. (I liked now and then to have the thing done professionally). It was high time I forgot all about that and concentrated on the job in hand.

Here I was, walking down a dusty side-street which I didn't rightly recognize, going in the opposite direction away from my home in the suburbs . . . and not far behind a little man with a bullet head was after me, peeping out of the shop fronts. I would have to fox him, and fox him properly. It couldn't be done lightly, it had to be thought out carefully.

I seemed to be moving into the business quarters. I passed big blocks of offices, inhabited by hundreds of formal unknown Messrs. I wondered whether to slip into one of the buildings and hide for a while, but decided the risk of arousing suspicion, possibly of being captured by a truculent commissionaire, was too great.

I went on, walking at about twice my normal speed. It was tiring, but it helped to keep up my morale. I kept crossing from one

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side of the road to the other, and taking right turnings and then left turnings. In this way I reckoned to mix the little man up a good deal. Also, in the process, I got myself completely lost. Indeed, I was gradually overcome by a fantastic feeling that I was now in a completely strange town, without any knowledge of locality or direction. It was possible that, in fact, many of the streets were normally familiar to me. But as I turned down one street and up another, I began to feel that I was in some gigantic maze, whose towering walls were nebulous and unreal.

Twice I became so lost that I found myself back at a street corner which I had passed a few moments previously. On the third occasion that this happened I found myself walking back on my tracks and saw, some way ahead of me, a sudden disturbance at a street-crossing. I didn't know how he had done it but I guessed that the little fellow was on my trail again, pushing his way through a crowd. I turned round and began running.

It was exciting in a way. There was always the persistent thrill of danger, arising out of the knowledge that I was being chased. There was, too, always the possibility of my coming round a corner and walking straight into the little man. I wondered which of us would have the presence of mind to act first.

I rather prided myself that we would at least be about even. I had worked out a very neat plan for lowering my head, butting him hard in the stomach and then dashing away, when, coming round a corner I bumped straight into a tall heavy policeman, knocking him sideways and staggering backwards myself.

"I'm terribly sorry, officer," I said.

Then I didn't wait for any more because I recognized his face and knew that I had already walked past him four times, in different streets. I had a dim idea that he shouted something after me, but by that time I had disappeared down an alley-way. It was a very long alley, and towering buildings shut out most of the light. I walked along it feeling more and more alone and frightened.

When I eventually emerged from it into a rather dingy shopping centre I was so exhausted—after three imaginary encounters in the shadows with the little man, and one terrifying episode in which I saw the policeman striding towards me out of a lamp-post—that there was sweat dripping off my forehead and a weak feeling in my legs.

That's the trouble with being chased. It doesn't matter really who's chasing you, if it goes on long enough it gets to the stage where you feel that everyone's chasing you. For instance, it wasn't long before I was going round not only with the little man and the big policeman on my track, but also with the knowledge that if I passed their way again at least three other people (a vegetable-

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stall man, a newspaper-seller and a squat woman shopkeeper) would decide I was either a criminal or a madman, and start chasing me themselves. For that reason I made a concentrated effort to move steadily away from the district where I had been wandering for an hour or so.

When I came out into the shopping street, one of the suburban type, I knew that I was succeeding to some extent. The street was less crowded—there was more space between the buildings—and the trams had that emptying look, as if they were penetrating farther and farther out of the town.

All this time, it was true, I hadn't seen the little man. But I knew that he was after me. There was something so very sure about him that I felt he wouldn't be thrown off easily. Indeed, I remembered once seeing a film about something like that, where a fellow was chased all over the place by a gunman. No matter what this man did, the gunman kept tracking him down. In the end he cornered him in his own sitting-room, with his wife in a faint on the floor, and shot him three times through the head. It turned out, of course, that the fellow being chased had played a dirty trick on the gunman in the past, so it was all made to seem quite reasonable.

My trouble was that I felt quite as sure that the little man would find me, but I couldn't for the life of me think of any reason for his interest. It was possible he hadn't got a gun (I shivered—his eyes were bad enough). But it was possible he had. I was glad that I hadn't gone home, following my first impulse; at least I wouldn't drag my wife into it.

I hadn't forgotten my wife. I knew that already she would be somewhat worried. Most evenings I got home by five o'clock and we always had supper at six: now it was well after six, and dusk had fallen.

Several times I thought. "Well I'll phone her, anyway," and crossed over to a telephone box. But each time I went inside and heard the door bang on me, a terrifying feeling came over me. There I was, all nicely cooped up in an oblong box. The next moment I would see the little man glaring in through the glass panes.

The moment I had that thought I pushed back the door and dashed out of the box. What's more, I was always pretty sure that if I hadn't done so, he would have been round the corner and on top of me.

I felt happier on the move. The trouble was that I suddenly realized I was tired, dead tired. Not for ten years had I walked and run so much. My head urged me to wander on until I had shaken off the little man. My legs and the rest of my body just ached and

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ached. Aching like that can wear down anything, even the most rigid of purposes. It just goes on and on, gets heavier and wearier until you feel you'll drop down dead about three steps forward. I didn't see much point in that. I began looking round for some shelter. Besides, it was getting dark, and there might be some real chance of giving him the slip.

In the end I picked on a small cinema, tucked away in a block of shops. It suddenly struck me as a brilliant idea. I fished two bob out of my pocket and darted in, thrusting the money at the box-office girl, grabbing the ticket and plunging into the welcome darkness. It was all smoky and hazy inside, but it was shelter. I found a seat at the end of a row. It was soft and cushioned . . . I sank into it with a sensuous feeling of comfort. I stretched my legs out luxuriously, leaning with heavy pleasure on the arm rests. I turned my attention to the screen and tried to forget about the little man.

It was about two minutes from the end of the big picture—something about a matador in Spain, the scene a bull-fight finale—when I heard the little man coming into the cinema. There's no way of explaining how or why, I just knew it was he. There was a faint light from the door, then I saw a shadow—floating down the aisle. There wasn't any girl or anyone else, just him. He was pretending to be a stranger, looking round casually for a seat. But I was watching him like a hawk and I saw him stop at the end of my row and slide himself into the first seat.

A moment later he was sitting in the fifth seat; then he'd dropped into the seventh seat. There were four seats between him and me, and the bull in the film was just making its death charge, when I leaped out of my seat and fled towards the cinema exit. It was a familiar feeling, only this time I did it quicker than ever before. I fancy even the little man was surprised.

It was dark when I got outside. It gave me a feeling of security, just like the cinema. I began loitering past the shops, trying to catch the sound of the little man's footsteps. The next thing that happened was someone shining a torch full on me, dazzling me, bathing me in relentless light. There wasn't time for any thinking. I just lowered my head and made a wild rush at the light.

I think my head went about straight into the centre of a stomach. The light went out and I heard a strangled "Ouch!" of pain. I must admit it gave me a thrill of sadistic pleasure, that moment. The action was so completely and devastatingly successful. It put me temporarily in supreme control of the situation. I saw a shadow sprawling on the pavement and started running away into the darkness. The wind was on my face as I vanished into the darkness . . . Indeed, it was almost exhilarating.

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I guessed that had made him mad. I heard some shouting and saw the torch come on again, whirling savagely. I also heard the surprising sound of a shrill whistle. A few minutes later there was an answering whistle somewhere ahead of me. These things, happening one after the other, rather confused me, but I had enough presence of mind to take a turning and sprint down it deep into the night.

I had to stop running pretty soon. I had to lean against a lamp-post and take great heaving breaths. Otherwise I felt I should have collapsed. I stood there for several tense moments, getting my breath back and at the same time listening for the sound of chasing footsteps. But by some miracle the quiet remained unbroken. My ears had to be content with the dull rustle of wind in the tree-tops that lined the road, and with far-off occasional hoots of cars.

It was very eerie—very eerie indeed. For, I suddenly realized, because there were no footsteps it did not mean I was not being followed. I would be a fool not to concede more than the average intelligence to the little man. He was the sort, I decided, visualizing his small, crafty face, alive with hidden cunning, who would possibly wrap cloth over his boots—or even take them off.

In a flash all sense of temporary relief vanished. Standing there I became aware, with a blinding horror, that every shadow, however vague, every rustle, however muffled, might not be what it seemed. Even the shapes of the trees might not be real . . . I think it was when I got to that state of mind that I gave up all efforts to preserve my morality, my sense of ethics, my character of an ordinary citizen who some hours previously had been sitting in his respectable office, doing his respectable job. There, swimming in the menacing shadows of a suburban residential street, I gave it all up and became the hunted fugitive, the animal who must use his cunning—not only to outwit his chaser, but to dispose of him.

I can remember how clear and simple it all became. It was as if a tremendous load had fallen away. I felt a wave of confidence pouring into me. At the same time I felt myself in powerful control of my senses, become aware of newly acquired strength. I waited not in fear but in expectancy for what I knew would eventually come. I didn't mind how long the wait, now that I knew exactly what course of action to follow, exactly what events were going to take place.

And it *was* a long wait. I felt the cold night air creeping into my clothes, enveloping my feet, my fingers, my ears, sinking into my limbs. I didn't dare stamp or flap my arms for fear of giving my position away. For now, the whole essence of success

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was surprise. I had moved close into the shadow of a tree, merging myself into its frame. I could not possibly be seen against that dark outline. There I waited, breathing as quietly as possible, hardly daring to move a muscle. In fact, I felt it would be dangerous even to think—I might weaken in my new resolve—so I deliberately devoted my mind to counting numbers.

I had reached one hundred and forty-five when I heard him coming. Probably to anyone else it would have sounded just like a rustle of wind in the trees, or a leaf blowing about—but, of course, that was just what he would have wanted me to think. I envisaged now his triumphant smile, his sense of achievement, and smiled to myself.

There was hardly any sound, just that occasional, apparently casual rustle. It was rather like somebody turning over the pages of a newspaper. And that, of course, reminded me of how I had first seen him, sitting there in the barber's shop, so insignificant, so innocent.

A huge, burning indignation swept over me at the thought of all the trouble he had given me. What had I ever done to him? Who was he to hound me down like a criminal? What right had he to bring terror into my life? It would take me weeks to recover from that one evening. And my wife—God knows what she would be thinking.

I had just reached the apex of these thoughts when I saw him. He was only a few feet away from me—the vaguest of shadows—but a sixth sense told me that it was he. He was sliding along, like some dirty, little sneak-thief.

I counted as he came nearer, giving him a certain number of steps to come level. One—two—three—four—five—six. "Seven," I said out loud, or I might even have shouted it, to startle him. Then I leapt forward and clutched him, and we went rolling on to the ground.

I had taken him completely by surprise. I was able to get my hands round his neck just where I wanted to. I knew exactly what to do, I had read it all in considerable detail in a crime novel. I held my fingers firmly into the flesh of his neck, pressing my body hard down on him, and with my two thumbs I felt for the narrow stem of his windpipe.

I had got him—I knew I had got him. I could feel him suddenly struggling, convulsively, like a drowning man. I maintained my grip, pressing tighter and tighter. I could feel my nails cutting into the flesh of his neck. I could hear the breath ebbing out of him.

My stranglehold sank deeper and deeper . . . Then, suddenly, like an immense nightmare, the darkness seemed to swoop down on

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me, pouring over me in a gigantic wave of pain. Conscious of a hopeless, detached sensation of bewilderment, I felt myself falling away . . . falling, falling, falling . . . down into a deep, black oblivion.

When I opened my eyes again it was no longer dark, but bright daylight. I was no longer fighting for my life in a quiet back street, but lying in bed in a hospital ward, with sunshine pouring through a window and falling in great streaks across the white coverlet.

There was a white-coated nurse sitting at a table in one corner. When she saw me open my eyes she got up and came over. She was smiling—somehow it warmed me through and through to see her smile.

I felt I just wanted to lie back there and drowse away with everything big and white and peaceful, with the sunshine pouring in, and the nurse smiling. But there was something stopping me, something small and hard pressing far away at the back of my mind. I didn't quite know what it was, and I couldn't quite express myself.

I looked up beseechingly at the nurse. She smiled and bent down, putting a cool hand on my head.

" It's all right, you just relax," she said. " You've had a nasty experience, a terrible shock, but you're going to be all right now. You just lie back and go to sleep again."

But I couldn't go to sleep, I couldn't. She must have known that, I thought irritably. I tried to tell her what I wanted with my eyes.

I looked at her pleadingly, passionately, begging her to answer my unformed question. For a few moments she stood looking down at me, a puzzled line creasing her forehead. Then she seemed to understand.

She gave a wide, reassuring smile.

" Now, don't you worry. You've had a nasty shock. Some madman tried to strangle you. Your neck's been cut about a bit . . . But there's nothing permanently damaged. A week or two here and we'll be able to pack you off home."

I looked at her dumbly. I felt as if I were about to tumble over the edge of a terrifying precipice, which I had climbed painfully and laboriously. I motioned her nearer, struggling to speak. The words came out at last, each one hurting the dry, swollen lining of my throat.

" Please," I said. " Please, bring me a mirror." The nurse hesitated, then nodded. She went over to the corner of the room and came back holding a large oval hand-mirror.

" There you are," she said soothingly. " Only some bandages around your neck. Nothing very frightening is it ? "

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But I didn't answer her. I looked in the mirror and the face I saw was a familiar one. It was small and ugly, with protruding teeth and sunken eyes, and the head was bald and round, like a bullet.

* * *

## *BEGINNERS, PLEASE*

**Almost everyone has at some time begun to read a famous novel or play. So can you identify these opening paragraphs ? Allow one point for the author and one for the source, making a total of sixteen. The answers are on page 117.**

1. The unstudied, even tedious, opening to a great novel :
*One sultry evening early in July a young man emerged from the small furnished lodging he occupied in a large five-storied house in the Pereoulok S——, and turned slowly, with an air of indecision, towards the K—— bridge.*

2. The first lines as the curtain goes up mean a lot to any play.
*Thomas. Soul !*
*Richard. —and the plasterer, that's fifteen groats—*

3. Non-fiction ? But the title may be familiar only through a film.
*All the long way from Bareilly to Khushalgar on the Indus (the first stage of my journey to Bannu) I was alone in my railway carriage with two couchant lions.*

4. This is the opening of what may be the author's best short story :
*" The marvellous thing is that it's painless," he said. " That's how you know when it starts."*
*" Is it really ? "*
*" Absolutely : I'm awfully sorry about the odour, though."*

5. Only one sentence—you either know it or you don't !
*The family of Dashwood had long been settled in Sussex.*

6. Just a love poem. But what a poem and what a lover !
*All Kings, and all their favorites*
*All glory of honors, beauties, wits*
*The Sun it selfe, which makes times as they passe . . .*

7. Novel or autobiography ? Twelve volumes, anyhow !
*For a long time I used to go to bed early. Sometimes, when I had put out my candle, my eyes would close so quickly I had not even time to say, " I'm going to sleep."*

8. Something tough and modern, and Hollywood filmed it.
*They threw me off the hay truck about noon. I had swung on the night before, down at the border, and as soon as I got up there under the canvas, I went to sleep.*

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# A PAIR OF BLUE EYES

**She was the next best thing to the *right man*, and even less *trouble***

## by MARGARET BONHAM

TWICE a week the green van came to the village; on the same two days Mrs. Miller was up at half-past eight and leaning out of the sitting-room window. Her lank hair and her dirty and faded green casement curtains blew about in the wind, and out of the sitting-room window she leaned to watch the cats. For Mrs. Miller, though she was indeed a fat slut and had no beauty and few virtues, felt strongly enough about cats to get out of her bed an hour or more early two days a week, winter and summer; and no other passion she was capable of had anything but the opposite effect.

Mrs. Miller did not often or consciously look at the fish-man himself; nor did any of the women who came out through their swinging gates with a dish in their hands and a leather purse. Mrs. Miller watched the cats from her window, and the women, standing one or two at a time in the half-secure screen of the van's open doors, looked no higher than his hands weighing, than the herrings and mackerel, than the scales and the lifting from the tray to their dish; more than capable he was of slipping a little herring from clean under their noses down to Mrs. Rhys's Tab who yelled for it beside his boots.

If his attention were distracted for a moment the women would shoo and scuff at Mrs. Rhys's Tab with their squashed slippers, and Mrs. Rhys's Tab would curl round to the other side of the fish-man's boots; and Mrs. Miller would put out her tongue at the women from her window.

Neither Mrs. Miller nor any of the women who came out to buy herrings and mackerel could have told you anything about the fish-man, except: he likes cats; medium tall he is, and thin; he wears a brown suit and a blue apron, his hair is drab, or greyish; cats is it with him, all the time.

The village, except for Mrs. Miller, thought him mad. Mad in this way is anyone who gives to cats what he might sell to women.

On Tuesdays and Fridays when the green van came to the village the tom-cat from the Seven Stars waited on the stone

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pillar at the end of the bridge. Down from the driving-seat climbed the fish-man to open the doors at the back, and the Seven Stars' cat, already at his feet with its wide cheeks puffed wider, put one paw on his leg and opened its triangular mouth for the consumption of a whiting that the fish-man wedged into it, head and tail drooping on either side.

The whiting and the Seven Stars' cat went off like a rocket into the yard of the inn; the fish-man, disinterested, weighed out plaice for the landlord. Beyond Mrs. Miller's cottage, down the street, all the other cats waited at their gates.

All the other cats waited for the fish-man and their whiting, in the early morning sun, and the smell of breakfast and beeswax and the all-important smell of fish. In the cottages the children sat moving their mouths ringed with milk, and from her window Mrs. Miller watched the fish-man drive past her from the Seven Stars to the other cottages, to the church gates; from the church gates back down the street, to stop last of all at her door.

Though she did not like fish she ate it for dinner on Tuesdays and Fridays, in her parlour which was dirty and faded like the green casement curtains and had a dark circle on the buff wall-paper where she leaned back when she had finished, with her greasy head against the wall, a cigarette in the corner of her mouth and her own cat, Henry, on her knees hooking fish-bones off the plate and chewing them one-sided on her stained cotton overall.

He was an old cat; age after the fashion of age had taken away his good shape and by nature he was not intelligent; he did not even to Mrs. Miller's eyes seem impressive, seem the sort of cat one would be proud to see sitting outside the gate waiting for the fish-man; but she was fond of him. The fish-man, looking at Henry teetering away behind a whiting, would say with an air of melancholy: "Indeed it seems wrong for a cat to be old, Mrs. Miller." True, Mrs. Miller thought; but she said: "Well, fond of them you get, like."

In the winter Henry died. Mrs. Miller grieved over him and refused the offer of a bastard kitten from the Seven Stars; but the fish-man's visits became meaningless talking of other people's cats and in time she began to think about getting another of her own. A great deal she thought about it, and saw herself with a beautiful and impressive cat like none of her neighbours', like no other cat in the village.

The fish-man leaned on her gate in the snow and said: "When will there be another Henry, now, Mrs. Miller?" "Maybe soon now," said Mrs. Miller, looking remotely up at the dark trees laced white against the dark sky, behind his head. She took her two herrings on a plate and went flapping and crackling in her broken

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slippers up the snowy path and into her parlour to light the fire.

She put the herrings on the rug beside her and sat on her heels pulling out from behind the coal-scuttle the crumpled paper in which Friday's cod had been wrapped. But when it was in the grate the word CATS looked at her from between the bars and she pulled it out again and smoothed it on her knee, the front page of *The Times*. Feeling in her overall pocket for a bent cigarette, she read:

Pedigree female Siamese kitten for sale, 4 months; house-trained; 3½gns. carriage paid Letchley, Elm House, Hastock, Shrops.

Mrs. Miller, with an unlit cigarette in the corner of her mouth, sat and stared at the empty grate, seeing in its crusted depths a firm picture of her front path and an elegant cat treading it like a heraldic creature, its tail like a dark gold ostrich plume waving against the snow.

Mrs. Miller had never seen a Siamese cat in her life. She got up from the hearthrug, leaving the herrings, and went to look for her wicked husband's typewriter, because she knew she had not the sort of handwriting in which to order a pedigree Siamese cat. It was a short letter and took her most of the morning.

When it was finished she put a coat on top of her overall and went out and took some money from her post office account and added some more from the housekeeping and bought postal orders for three and a half guineas. Then she stuck a stamp on the letter and went back and lit the fire.

"Well now, where is the new Henry, Mrs. Miller?" said the fish-man on Friday, leaning on the white-edged gate; and Mrs. Miller looked up at the trees and said: "Coming any day now. A new sort of cat I'm getting," she said, staring up at the sky closing like a grey oyster-shell over the village; "a valuable cat," she said with a casual folding of her dirty overall round her neck against the cold wind.

"There's good news, Mrs. Miller, indeed," said the fish-man. "A Persian cat, is it?"

"No," said Mrs. Miller, "not an old Persian. Something different in the way of a cat it will be; not till it comes will you see what sort of a cat it is."

"I hope it comes fast," said the fish-man, "for I can't wait to know."

"Like enough by Tuesday," said Mrs. Miller. "It's a she-cat," she said over her shoulder as she flapped away up the path.

The letter came saying when the elegant new cat would arrive at the station. There was some furtive feeling in Mrs. Miller that

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she must look impressive for such a cat's first view of her, and she put on her best blue costume and pearl ear-rings and the coat with a piece of fur, and combed her hair round her fingers and walked a mile through the snow to the station in black shoes with high heels.

She sat half an hour in the waiting-room, for the train was late, but when it came in at last with the single carriage furred with a rim of smoky snow she shot into the luggage-office and leaned against the counter like a lady while Mr. Jones, who did everything at the station, brought in a bicycle and a wicker basket of hens and a smaller basket like someone's picnic lunch.

Mr. Jones put the smaller basket on the counter and it gave out a most appalling howl; a howl in a minor key it was, to make your blood run cold.

"God save us," said Mr. Jones, stepping back into the bicycle, "what is in there, Mrs. Miller?"

"A cat, it is," said Mrs. Miller uncertainly, and leaned forward to point out the label saying VALUABLE CAT tied to the handle.

"Indeed that is no cat," said Mr. Jones; "cats mew. Let us have a look now," he said, and took hold of the strap with caution; but Mrs. Miller, hypnotized by the howl, said quickly: "No, Mr. Jones, I will be taking it home with me now. What would we do if it got out?"

Mr. Jones shook his head and said: "You should not be opening it at home with no man in the house; indeed, Mrs. Miller, I should come and stand over it with the poker."

"No poker will I have waved over my pedigree cat, Mr. Jones," said Mrs. Miller, recovering her aplomb, "and a cat it is for sure; I bought it out of the paper; it howls with fright from your old train."

And she picked up the basket firmly and went out to the snowy road; by the time she got home to the cottage she was reconciled to such strangeness in a cat's voice and could not without difficulty wait to open the basket and see this elegant exotic creature that was to have dark-gold feathery fur and a tail like an ostrich plume.

So she put the basket on the parlour table even before she had taken off her coat, and undid the label and the strap and the catch and threw back the lid; and then reeling towards the fireplace she went with a melodramatic gesture like someone in a play, and cried: "God help us!" knowing she had been sold for a fool and palmed off with some kind of monkey.

Away went Mrs. Miller's visions of long gold fur and golden plumes; such a sense of embarrassment she had now, thinking of what the fish-man would say, and the neighbours, and whether the creature would spring on her and howl, for she could see only the top half looking out of the basket. A creature it was for sure and

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not a cat, thought Mrs. Miller ; what cat has fur as flat as a skinned rabbit and a face as pointed as a piece of cheese and eyes as blue as china and squinting inwards to its nose ? And what cat was called not Henry or Tab or Smut, but Tulan Caprian of Hastock ? Mrs. Miller spelt it out on the label.

Disbelievingly she went on staring, and so did Tulan ; disbelievingly she said " Puss . . . ? " and went back another step when Tulan climbed out of the basket on to the table ; truly Mrs. Miller would not have been surprised to see four green paws and a red tail with a fork on the end, and was hardly less taken aback by those thin legs like a Victorian dancer's in dark stockings and a tail no thicker, it seemed to Mrs. Miller (who had not even now entirely given up thoughts of ostrich plumes), than a piece of tarred string.

" Well, God save us, delirious I must be," she said to herself, and put the kettle on the fire with one eye on Tulan. Tulan sat on the table with that tail curled round those feet, and presently gave a tentative amiable howl. Mrs. Miller, jumping at the tenor key, quickly took a plate of fish out of the cupboard and edged it on to the brown plush cloth.

" Well," she said under her breath, " one queer-looking monster you are and no mistake." She backed away to the kitchen and made herself a cup of tea, which was not really what she wanted, but the Seven Stars was shut.

Alone in the parlour, in a shell of lamplight and firelight away from the dark and snow outside, they spent the evening, Tulan confidently and Mrs. Miller with a shocked distrust. Every time she looked at the azure squint, the dark thin legs, the dark-brown tail like a monkey's and the flat short fur the colour of pale oatmeal with a glitter like the sun on snow, she thought about what the neighbours would say and above all the fish-man to-morrow morning.

Tulan sat in front of the fire with her dark pointed ears pricked up, turning the nearer one towards Mrs. Miller when she sighed or muttered, as if in politeness to lose no word of what she said. This was unnerving ; Mrs. Miller fell silent and smoked a chain of bewildered cigarettes.

At half-past nine she made herself another cup of tea, and Tulan for the first time jumped into her lap, curling dark feet under a pale swansdown breast, and purring. At half-past ten she could not be left alone and wild in the kitchen or the parlour for the night. She slept on Mrs. Miller's bed.

Because of the fish-man the alarm clock was set for a quarter-past eight. Mrs. Miller woke to see Tulan square in her line of vision and six inches from her eyes. She recoiled and got out of bed.

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At once she thought of the fish-man and wished she were safe in solitude, his visit past; but she said to herself: "I will have to get it over, and a nuisance it will be; indeed, he is sure to laugh at the creature; but I will get it over and out of the way." She put on her clothes and her messy faded overall, and went down with Tulan to the kitchen.

When the fire was lit she slopped into the parlour and looked out of the window. There the green van stood outside the Seven Stars, and the black tom-cat (a cat to reassure you after the what-you-will chewing the table-cloth fringe behind your back) was galloping off with his whiting between the red and snowy pillars of the yard entrance.

All down the street the green van went, stopping and selling fish to the women who came out with white dishes and strawberry noses into the cold, stopping and giving fish to the fine ordinary cats that mewed as cats should and rubbed their properly furred backs and covered flanks against the fish-man's boots; down the street it went to the church gates, watched with growing misgiving by Mrs. Miller from behind her stained and faded green curtains, turned round, and drove back to her cottage.

Mrs. Miller looked despairingly at Tulan, picked up the enamel dish and went out of the blistered door.

"Well, Mrs. Miller, now," said the fish-man with his hand on the gate, "will the grand new cat be here yet?"

Mrs. Miller looked up at the trees. "Well," she said repressively, "arrived it has for sure; but indeed it's not the sort of cat I expected. It's a great wonder to me," she said with a rush, preparing him for the worst, "that it passes for a cat at all."

"Very sad that is, Mrs. Miller, now, if it's not what you hoped," said the fish-man, "but perhaps it's only she will not be feeling herself after the journey."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Miller on a round note, thinking of the parlour table-cloth, "she is feeling herself all right; her looks it is that are not like a proper cat's at all." She tapped her fingers on the enamel dish and stared up at the trees in silence, but the fish-man was looking over her shoulder at the door.

He looked past her at the cottage and the open door, and cried with such an air of surprise that she was startled. "Why, Mrs. Miller," he cried, "why, she's a beauty!"

Mrs. Miller turned round and saw Tulan, seeming very small, treading with her dark-legged dancer's step up the snowy path, with her dark ears pointed to the breath of fish, her dark thin tail like a question mark up from the pale thin line of her back; Mrs. Miller looked at her and saw with a shock that she was a beauty indeed. Now all the other cats seemed gross and without shape,

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But she said nothing, only stared at Tulan and tapped her fingers on the enamel dish; and Tulan trod up to the fish-man and gave her urgent howl.

The fish-man was enchanted; he took her up in his arms and said: "Why, Mrs. Miller, this is the greatest beauty of a cat I've seen in a lifetime, for sure. God save us, Mrs. Miller," he said, "were you telling me you were disappointed in a cat like this? What sort of cat is it called, now?"

"It's a Siamese cat," said Mrs. Miller, caught out in the wrong opinion and a little cross, "and a big cat I thought it would be with a great tail like feathers." "So help me," said the fish-man, "will you look at the blue eyes? What would you want with a lot of fur and no bones? Losing her to me you will be, Mrs. Miller, if she's not the cat you wanted."

"Well, I do want her," said Mrs. Miller quickly; "it's getting used to her is a matter of time."

She looked at Tulan and then at the fish-man, and in a moment she laughed; meeting the fish-man's eyes over Tulan's head like two people in a film over the head of a reconciling child, for the first time Mrs. Miller impaled him with a direct stare and saw that his eyes were as blue as the cat's; and for his part the fish-man thought the cat's eyes were not more blue than hers.

Tulan breathed fish over his shoulder, and howled. "Well, Mrs. Miller," he said, and turned to the van, "we will see what the beautiful cat would like."

He picked up a whiting by its tail and held it over Tulan who embraced it like a monkey, and hanging on by claws and teeth was lowered through the air to the ground. Mrs. Miller and the fish-man stood in the snow and watched the whiting disappear faster than you could believe.

With Tulan there was no doubt the fish-man was a success. "What does your husband say to such a cat, now?" he said suddenly.

Mrs. Miller opened her eyes as startled as if Tulan had asked instead: she had not believed him capable of talking about anything but cats and fish and the weather.

"That I couldn't tell you," she said, "for he's not here."

"In the Forces he would be, I expect," said the fish-man; and Mrs. Miller said: "Very likely, indeed, if they are not too particular; three years it is since he set eyes on me and I would be sorry if I saw him again." "That's a sad thing for you, Mrs. Miller," said the fish-man, "and grieved I am to hear it, but we all make mistakes."

Mrs. Miller looked at the high trees, and after a pause she said: "Well, I will be going in now."

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"Well, you will take another little fish for the beautiful cat," said the fish-man, leaning over Tulan in passionate admiration and slapping a whiting as large as a dog-fish on to Mrs. Miller's enamel dish, "and on Friday I will be seeing the cat again. There is something to look forward to, Mrs. Miller," he said, standing with his elbow on the gate, watching both of them go up the path, Mrs. Miller scrunching and scuffing in her broken slippers and Tulan prancing behind howling and flipping up her back legs.

Both he and Mrs. Miller, with one mind, had forgotten the two herrings that Mrs. Miller had come out to buy for her dinner.

Having accepted Tulan, Mrs. Miller found that it meant what might almost be called hard work.

Tulan's passion was inevitably for the front line. She could not be forgotten for hours at a time and satisfied with a stroke and a plate of fish; she would be talked to incessantly, and carried her side of the conversation with a positive conviction; she would not be left alone.

Mrs. Miller found herself playing exacting games on the stairs, playing bending three feet from the ground to be patted on both temples, playing with balls of paper for Tulan to fly somersaulting round the room without touching the floor.

Soon, since Tulan howled when she was left, Mrs. Miller began to take her out shopping in the village, held in a fold of her coat. The village people, disapproving, called her "Mrs. Miller's monkey." Now Tulan slept in bed with her head against Mrs. Miller's neck on the pillow, and Mrs. Miller put on extra face cream for Tulan to lick off.

She was an unsentimental, affectionate slut of a creature and Tulan's company suited her down to the ground; the next best thing she was to the right man, and even then less trouble.

Longer and longer the fish-man stayed leaning over the gate on Tuesdays and Fridays, talking to both of them; his gifts to Tulan inflated so in size that indeed Mrs. Miller would not have been surprised to see him drag a shark out of his van any moment.

"I am thinking I will have to have a cat like this for myself, Mrs. Miller," he said, "for seeing her twice a week is not enough." Mrs. Miller leaned her elbow on the rotting gate-post and looked over his head.

"What would your wife think of that?" she said, and the fish-man, watching Tulan with a whiting as big as herself, said: "There is no wife in my house and never has been." "Then who looks after you?" said Mrs. Miller, and he said: "Why for sure, I look after myself. There is no worry for me in not having things

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as they should be," he said, " for a cat or two and plenty to eat and a good fire is enough."

" That's right indeed," said Mrs. Miller, stooping to run her finger between Tulan's ears. She looked up at him with her greasy hair falling in her eyes and smirked to show her white teeth. " Enough for anyone, for sure," she said.

The snow melted and Tulan grew a shade larger and sometimes the fish-man stayed talking for an hour or more; when Tulan was too full of fish to howl for more she would sit on his shoulder and wash her Oriental face, and Mrs. Miller would prop herself against the still-rotting gate-post which creaked on and off under her considerable weight, and they would talk cats till their throats were dry.

This was something for the village to gossip about under its breath in the shops, how long the green van stayed outside the cottage; but never more than a yard from it went Mrs. Miller and the fish-man, so there was no surmise of absence to add interest, and for her part Mrs. Miller was secure in herself and cared not a straw what was said.

Now when she looked up over the fish-man's head at the tall line of trees on the hill they were dark with the red colour of advancing spring.

" This sort of weather I would like to be going on holiday," she said to the fish-man; and the fish-man said quickly, as if he had been waiting: " Would you like a little drive in the van, now ? "

Mrs. Miller went on staring at the trees in silence; at last she said: " Indeed, that would be a nice change; where is it you will be going from here ? "

" Pleased I would be to take you anywhere you want," said the fish-man, " but if you would like it we could take Tulan to see my cats. Not a very good house, mine is, but she would be welcome."

" That would be a change for Tulan too," said Mrs. Miller, looking at him carefully and seeming pleased with what she saw.

She went flapping up the damp path into the kitchen, and put on her coat, and took eighteen and ninepence out of the teapot on the shelf and her Post Office Savings book from the chaos behind the mangle, and snapped them into a dirty handbag, and went out and shut the door behind her.

The fish-man leaned on the gate, and Tulan sat on his shoulder beginning to howl for more whiting, for the first lot was an hour past and she had room again.

" She will not have been in a motor before, I expect," said the fish-man, and swung her down on to his arm. " Well there, is everything ready, then ? " he said, looking at Mrs. Miller; and

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Mrs. Miller said: "For sure everything is ready, now," and shut the gate with a bang that broke the post.

Mrs. Miller knew, and the fish-man knew, that she would not come back to the cottage again except to settle her affairs; but they said nothing.

"There is a fine place for the beautiful cat," said the fish-man, and he put the speechless Tulan into the back of the van with all the sprats and whiting and herrings, and shut the doors.

"A fine place indeed," said Mrs. Miller, and sitting beside him in the front, on a torn fishy cushion, she watched Tulan through the little window while they drove past the Seven Stars and out of the village.

* * *

## *PRELUDE TO SPRING*

ON a bright February morning the sun glinting on stripped woods can counterfeit a summer, so vividly does it reveal their grey-green bark; and when the sun is setting crimson, the leaning shadows tan bare boughs with the shade of indefinable plum-ness that Eton boys wear (or used to wear) for their O.T.C.

Today the woods wait black—a dulled ebony—so that I was tempted to walk out of my way to find how near I need venture before the mirage faded, and their green-grey bark asserted itself.

Yet this blackness, which to some minds will symbolize death and unmotion, is offset by the wind that has set the world tumbling and swirling and nodding. I have never seen the world in such a hurry, nor nature so flustered. Wherever I look, there is movement. The trees are moving unwontedly (as the giant oaks) and lithely (as the slim beech saplings). The hedgerows are moving. The clouds and the dust and the brown dead leaves are moving. Even the manes of worried mares are moving.

Indeed, this mass-movement is so remarkable, and has affected so many objects hitherto (as I thought) immobile, that I begin to notice certain things for the first time, and am dismayed at my own late neglect of them. On the walls of houses, for example, all manner of creepers and ivies and stray dun wisps (that in calmer days I had missed) now slither and flap and otherwise announce themselves.

High-swung from barn-beams, lantern and wool-wisps and strips of tattered sacking sway and jig to the wind, and I have never before seen them up there. Clothes-lines in cottage gardens play at a wild see-saw, and these too I have never noticed.

Dwarf ferns at the foot of the signpost are flipping and flapping, and although I have passed that post perhaps three thousand times, yet I never saw those ferns until today.

J. H. B. PEEL

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# ILLICIT CARGO

**It was horrible and beautiful at the same time . . .**

## by GEOFFREY KINO

IF a white man has business in China these days, it is unlikely to be particularly pleasant. But I am certain that my mission to Canton would have deserved the blessings of an angel when compared with the doubtful purpose of George Barber's trip.

I had completed my business and was sitting down drinking some whisky in the squalid little room that had served me as bedroom and headquarters during my brief stay, when the door was flung open and Barber walked in. It was a great surprise to see him for I had no idea that he was in the East. His appearance was shocking. His ducks were filthy, he had a three or four days' growth of beard and I doubt if he had washed for the same length of time. He slammed the door behind him and stood with his back to it surveying first myself and then the room.

" Give me a drink, Dayne." He came across the room and flung himself down on my bed.

He took the glass I handed to him and drained it in one gulp. Then he gave me the semblance of a smile and muttered : " That's better."

" What the hell do you want, and where have you come from ? " I demanded.

" Give me a moment and I'll tell you." He lit a cigarette.

" I've been every kind of a bastard in my time but these Chinese swine are beyond everything. Beside them I reckon I'm a saint." He inhaled deeply. His eyes were on my bottle of Scotch and resignedly I gave him another measure. He nodded his thanks.

" I've been up into the hinterland. Don't ask me what took me there—you can probably guess anyway. There's a village up in those hills where every form of licentiousness is practised, where each man is a devil in his own right. That's where I found her. Would you believe it ? A white girl." He took a sip of his drink. " Dayne, you've never seen anything like it. Don't ask me what they've done with this poor girl, my imagination baulks at it. She's lovely. Even in the filth and misery of her surroundings she

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was like a flower—a rose on a dung heap," he savoured the analogy and nodded. "And the poor kid's a deaf mute."

I took a drink and waited, half guessing what he was going to say next, and wondering how I would answer it.

"I don't know what came over me, Dayne, but I suppose some hidden decency suddenly took possession of me. To put it in a nutshell, when I'd finished my business, I brought her with me. I've got her locked in the lavatory along the corridor. Dayne, I want you to take her back to civilization."

"Why me?" I asked involuntarily.

"Who else? The chieftain is after me. I'm safe provided I lie low but I've made no arrangements to get out. I've got to stay in this rotten country. They want me in Shanghai and Singapore. It'd mean a ten-year stretch, and even China is better than that. You're in the clear there. You could take her out and get her to England or America. Once she's there, turn her over to some charity, but for God's sake don't leave her here."

"How the hell am I to get her out even if I succeed in reaching Shanghai?" I took another pull from the bottle.

"Slip a ring on her finger and get some fake marriage lines. Good God man, you've enough contacts to rig up a small thing like that." He was beginning to bluster, to bully again. That sudden impulse of decency which had urged him to this act of mercy was beginning to peter out.

"How'd she get there in the first place?" I so despised Barber that I was faintly suspicious of the whole thing, of him more than of his story.

"I don't know. There was an American here before the war married to an Englishwoman. He was a sort of missionary doctor I think. She may well be their child but you see being a deaf mute she can't tell you a thing. She's not been taught any form of sign language; she's as dependent on other people as a paralytic." He stubbed out his cigarette on the knob of the bed. "Do this for me, Dayne, and I'll give you enough money for your trip home."

"Fetch her," I told him.

He was gone about five minutes, then he returned and thrust the girl into the room. Despite the filth of her garb and the drab hair tied back in the Chinese style, I understood Barber's involuntary action. She was lovely. She stood in the middle of the room, her hands folded in front of her over a small rag bundle—her worldly possessions, I supposed. But it was her eyes that commanded attention—great brown eyes that were her only means of expression. I knew then that, whatever reasons I might find to put against the scheme, I would take this girl to safety. The decision was as simple as that.

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" Sit down," I told her, but she stood there staring at me with those huge brown eyes, and her expression was one of such extreme terror that I felt incapable of approaching her. Not so Barber. He took her roughly by the shoulders and pushed her into the cane chair where she sat shivering from fear.

" Well, will you do it ? "

I nodded. " How can I refuse ? "

" Fine. Now I'll be off. I'm ahead of the swine at the moment and I don't want them to get wind of what I've done. Here's the money." He thrust a bundle of dollars—American dollars, I noted with surprise—into my hand. " Good luck," he said, and was gone.

The girl stared after him and then brought her eyes back to me. Every time I glanced at her she looked away.

A deaf mute. What, I wondered, had I done to deserve such a responsibility ? I poured her a drink. She took it from me and sipped it, then nodded her head and drank it down.

My plans meant leaving at midnight and there was an hour to go.

" Well," I said, " I must christen you something." I stared at her. She looked away again. " I'll call you Eve," I said, groping vaguely, I suppose, for some name that would express her alluring beauty.

I gave her some biscuits which she stuffed into her mouth, and then I began to pack. All the time I could feel her eyes on me but I studiously avoided looking at her.

There is little need to describe the journey to Shanghai. If you know the country you can visualize the journey. No description of mine could make the horror of it live for those who don't know it.

In Shanghai I found an hotel where I was known and where no questions would be asked. All I wanted was sleep. As best I could I indicated to Eve that I expected her to undress and prepare for bed. If I had to fake her position as my wife, it had to begin now. A slight inquiry, a slight slip-up and that would be the end.

She was in bed before me and as I lay back against the pillows she began her love play.

During our journey I had studied her and been surprised at the softness of her hands. I had imagined that she would have worked in the rice fields with the other women. Yet her hands, though grimed with dirt, were slender and elegant, the fingers surmounted by fantastically long finger-nails. Now as these hands explored and caressed my body with assurance, I knew to what purpose she had been put. It was impossible to resist her ; she moved and twined her body eager to satisfy me. She knew only one thing in life and, to her uneducated, childlike mind, this was the purpose of her being, the only purpose, and she executed it with a cold, efficient skill. Yet

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once aroused—she was impossible to resist—and finally satiated, I lay back and thought of the horror of this silent love play. No words of endearment had ever been heard by her, no words of love could ever pass her lips. It was horrible and beautiful at the same time, for though she might be a prostitute through circumstance, there was about her an aura of innocence.

By the light of some passing vehicle I saw her eyes fixed on me, waiting for the slightest sign that I might want her again. There she lay rigidly watching, and I must have dropped off to sleep with her still awaiting her master's slightest whim.

The next morning I had to go out, and much as I detested having to do it I locked her in the room and told the boy downstairs that my wife was not to be disturbed.

I bought a cheap gold ring and found a man who faked up a marriage certificate and a passport which he completed for the sum of five hundred American dollars.

My next call was to the shipping company, where I was lucky enough to obtain a cancellation on a ship sailing that night—the cancellation was for a double cabin. I wondered what evil or friendly star was looking down on me.

I bought some western clothes for Eve and when I got back I found her sitting on the floor facing the door in exactly the same position as I had left her. Such is the servility of the terrified.

I gave her some of the food I'd bought and as I handed it to her I said: "I'll take the terror out of your eyes, Eve, if it's the last thing I do—I promise you that."

She looked up at me from her food but there was no expression in those eyes at all.

After she had finished her meal, I made her get dressed in the new clothes. They were not elegant and they fitted badly but the improvement was amazing. Emaciated though she was, ill with fear and evil treatment, the girl was wonderfully, pathetically beautiful—and she knew it. She stood admiring herself in the mirror, brushing her hair until she found a style that suited her. She was like a child dressing up in her mother's clothes.

I had finished packing when I found the pathetic and dirty little bundle to which she had clung since she'd been thrust upon me. I picked it up and was about to throw it into the waste-paper basket when she flew at me in a fury. Her mouth was bared open and she hissed at me through her teeth and fought me with her hands. Her incredibly long finger-nails tore at my face in a frenzied effort to regain the foul little bundle. I pulled her off me, threw her on the bed and flung the bundle at her.

"Take it if you want it so badly." I dabbed the blood from the scratches on my face. The moment she had the bundle she flung

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herself at my feet, waiting to be beaten for her behaviour. I wondered how often a foot had been lifted in her face when she bowed obedience before her master of the moment.

My own annoyance melted and I lifted her up and kissed her. Immediately she opened her mouth. I pushed her away feeling sick, thinking of her automatic reaction, of her sadly mature knowledge of how to please a man. She stared at me in bewilderment. The fear in those eyes had changed for a moment to amazement.

I took her arm and led her downstairs and paid the bill while the shifty-eyed little manager leered at Eve. I took a taxi to the docks and we got on board ship only twenty minutes before sailing time. We went straight to our cabin where I locked the door. Very soon we'd be on our way and then I could sort out my conflicting emotions. I tried by gesture and by smiles to reassure Eve but she lay on the floor whimpering with alarm. It was horrible to watch and to be unable to assuage those fears at all.

That night we ate in our cabin and I asked the steward to bring down a bottle of Scotch and some soda. While I drank she sat at my feet, and eventually I realized she had dropped off to sleep using the bundle of clothes, or whatever it was, as her pillow. Asleep she lay curled up and every few seconds her body would twitch as the tautened nerves jumped and slackened. I knew it would be fatal to try and lift her on to the bed so I threw some blankets over her and crawled into bed. I was still tired from my business trip and the whisky had had its soothing effect. I was soon asleep.

How long I slept I don't know but I found myself being gently awakened and before the last phases of sleep had cleared from my brain I knew that Eve was trying to coax me into loving her. Her actions were eager and expert, and suddenly I understood the feverish fondling. I had spurned her once back in that hotel; now I had gone to bed without waking her and forcing her to get into bed with me. I had heard of such women in Chinese encampments, heard of what happened to them when they failed to please their masters, and I knew that to spurn her now would give her a greater agony of mind than the necessity of having to make love to a man of whom she was patently terrified.

The next morning I took her on deck and managed to walk her round the ship. She clung to me, but little by little I could see the interest in her eyes as she saw sights that she could never have witnessed before—passengers disporting themselves in the pool, small children laughing as they wove in and out among the deck chairs. Groups of people talking would break off and stare at us as we passed. For the first time I was thankful that she could not hear what they said.

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Back in the cabin I sent for the hairdresser and then rang the ship's dress-shop for an assistant to come and fit my wife with some new dresses. When they arrived Eve backed towards the bathroom, but I forced her forward.

To the young lady hairdresser I explained: "My wife has been through a terrible illness. It has left her deaf and dumb. Treat her gently and do what you can for her. If she is at all difficult, you'll find me in the bar." I gave Eve a smile and nodded towards the girl who smiled diffidently back. Eve's eyes flew from my face to the girl's and back. She was puzzled but not frightened—with a sigh of relief I left, telling the girl to let me know when she and the dress-maker had finished.

Over my Scotch and soda I reviewed my position. I was well enough off to give up my life of chance; I could take a cottage somewhere in the country and devote my life to this girl. Strange thoughts motivated by I know not what. Love? I discarded it with my third whisky but came back to it with my next. Could a man of forty-odd fall in love with a deaf and dumb girl? No nagging tongue to spoil the bliss of marriage, I told myself sagely over my fifth whisky. But how could I ever hope to lead a normal social life with a wife who was practically an imbecile? It would take Eve years to pick up even the rudiments of normal everyday life. How could this girl become acquainted with our social standards, and learn the true meaning of love as opposed to sexual orgies? By the time I'd had my sixth whisky I was becoming philosophical; I sincerely believed I had a mission in life and, to be honest, I had a suspicion that I might be going to enjoy it.

Two hours had gone by when there was a message from my room to say that my wife was ready. I made my way back and opened the door. Eve sat on the bed and for a moment I didn't recognize her. Her drab, brown-coloured hair had been washed, cut and curled. Her eyebrows had been shaped and her face made up. She looked radiantly beautiful. She was wearing a black taffeta dress with a deep V-neck and it showed off her perfect little body. The fear had left her eyes and they were smiling up at me, deeply adoring. By gilding the lily I had won her confidence. She sat with a quaint poise, her hands folded in her lap, the elongated nails bright scarlet. A strangely sophisticated child. I beamed at her proudly through my whisky haze. "You're a beauty, Eve, a beauty!" She stared at my lips, then her eyes went back to mine and she smiled.

From that moment I surrendered to her completely, and indeed the seven weeks aboard ship were like a honeymoon. When we promenaded on the deck, people still stared but now it was out of admiration for Eve, not curiosity. We still ate in our cabin mostly

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because we preferred being alone together, and slowly I was beginning to break down the barrier of silence. Only one thing stood between us—that filthy ragged bundle. She clung to it like a child to a toy. Perhaps within its folds were some small remembered articles from her own childhood, perhaps one day I should so gain her confidence that she would show them to me and laugh with me at their memories. I showed her how to point at things she needed, how to nod when I offered her something she wanted, how to shake her head when she didn't. We were finding companionship.

Then one day the coast of England rose out of the mist. We were packing feverishly and the peace of shipboard life gave way to the violent activity of going ashore. It was then that I lost Eve.

One minute she was beside me, the next she had disappeared. I searched the ship frantically. I enlisted half the crew in the search. I ran round the docks, searching everywhere. Finally, as the place became deserted and the last passengers drifted away, I went to the police station, reported her as lost, gave a detailed description of her appearance and left the address of my hotel.

I sat in the little hotel bedroom and knew suddenly that without Eve my life would not be worth living. In the middle of the room was my luggage. Something was missing from it—Eve's precious bundle had gone with her. It was as if she had never been, as if she had been a dream without substance, without flesh and blood.

How long I sat I shall never know but suddenly there was a knock at the door and there stood Eve beside a stalwart policeman. I pressed a pound note into his hand, dragged Eve in and held her very close to me. She smiled at me, kissed me and held me tight.

We undressed and went to bed and she lay suppliant in my arms. And then suddenly I heard a voice. It said: "Richard Dayne, are you ever going to make an honest woman of me?" I lay there petrified. Then it dawned on me. I had been the dupe of Barber and of Eve. I switched on the light and stared at her.

She was laughing at me, but those eyes showed infinite tenderness, and I knew that whatever this had started out to be, it had ended in complete and utter love.

Too overcome to speak, cross at being deceived, I switched out the light and allowed her to begin her wonderful caresses. As I turned to kiss her, I began to wonder what had been in that filthy little bundle and how much Barber had made out of the deal.

* * *

*Scandal is gossip made tedious by morality.*

OSCAR WILDE

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# BEDSIDE MANNER

## The mixture to be taken three times daily with more than a grain of salt

To Mr. Richo, chirurgeon for advising about the turning about of my neck £1. For 2 dozen of pills 3s. and for a pint of sack 1s. His direction is that I am to take 3 pills over night and anything warm in the morning once in two dayes and if I am no better I am to use a large blyster behind the shoulder blade; to do it againe in a fortnight and then afterwards to shave my head.

*Diary of Giles Moore, Rector of Horsted Keynes, February 1st, 1660*

## *To Prevent the Tooth-ache*

*Let the Patient frequently rub his Teeth moderately with the Ashes that remain in Tobacco-Pipes, after the rest of the Body hath been consumed in Smoak; sometime after, washing (if need be) his Mouth with fair Water not too cold.*

THE HON. ROBERT BOYLE, *Medicinal Experiments*

## *. . . And Say Nothing*

"The gorgios used to come to my daia for rem'dies. She had some funny ones, too. I used to say I had diarrhoea as a chavvi because her cure for that was baked cheese which I liked. And she made me gargle a sore throat with something she made from honeysuckle berries which took it away beautiful . . ."

Ted was talking quite prosaically and added calmly—"Then for warts she'd kill a slug on a hawthorn thorn."

I realized with a jolt that he had passed unconsciously from medicine to magic.

"Why would she do that?" I asked quietly.

"Don't know. That's what she said, anyway. If you was to kill a slug on a hawthorn thorn your warts would go . . .

"But there's another way to get rid of warts," Ted added. "Tie 'em tight with horse-hair, rub 'em with lean beef, and say nothing."

RUPERT CROFT-COOKE, *The Moon in My Pocket*

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## *Germ-Proof*

*The Antiseptic Baby and the Prophylactic Pup*
*Were playing in the garden when the Bunny gambolled up ;*
*They looked upon the Creature with a loathing undisguised ;*
*It wasn't Disinfected and it wasn't Sterilized.*

*They said it was a Microbe and a Hotbed of Disease ;*
*They steamed it in a vapour of a thousand-odd degrees ;*
*They froze it in a freezer that was cold as Banished Hope*
*And washed it in permanganate with carbolated soap.*

*In sulphuretted hydrogen they steeped its wiggly ears ;*
*They trimmed its frisky whiskers with a pair of hard-boiled shears ;*
*They donned their rubber mittens and they took it by the hand*
*And 'lected it a member of the Fumigated Band.*

*There's not a Micrococcus in the garden where they play ;*
*They bathe in pure iodoform a dozen times a day ;*
*And each imbibes his rations from a Hygienic Cup*
*The Bunny and the Baby and the Prophylactic Pup.*

ARTHUR GUITERMAN, *Lyric Laughter*

## *Panacea*

Bruse a Marigold leafe, and put it into thy nose to clense the heade and avoide reume.

Take the Conserve of the Flowres fasting, to cure the trembling of the heart and to withstand the plague and evil ayre.

Wash the mouth therwith for the toothach, it is a present remedy.

The flowers colour haire yelow.

Preseruative from death, drink 111 graynes of Marigolds.

Wits lost or mad, take the juice of Marigolde and Wormwood of eche one Spoonfull.

Cramp in Children, seethe Marigolds in water and bath them therein, and anoynt with oyle of Lillies or of Priuet.

WILLIAM LANGHAM,
*The Garden of Health*, 1578

## *To Cure the Jaundice*

*—eat nine lice on a piece of bread and butter.*

*Old Dorset Belief*

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## *Unpossyble*

Mayster Isaac sayth that it is unpossyble for them that drynketh overmoche water in theyr youth to come to the aege that gŏd ordeyned them.

*The Grete Herbal*, 1526

## *A Common Cold, Gadzooks!*

*Go hang yourself, you old M.D.!*
*You shall no longer sneer at me . . .*
*I did not call you to be told*
*My malady is a common cold . . .*

*Give ear, you scientific fossil!*
*Here is the genuine Cold Colossal;*
*The Cold of which researchers dream,*
*The Perfect Cold, the Cold Supreme.*
*This honoured system humbly holds*
*The Supercold to end all colds;*
*The Cold Crusading for Democracy;*
*The Fuhrer of the Streptococcracy.*

*Bacilli swarm within my portals*
*Such as were ne'er conceived by mortals,*
*But bred by scientists wise and hoary*
*In some Olympian laboratory;*
*Bacteria as large as mice,*
*With feet of fire and heads of ice*
*Who never interrupt for slumber*
*Their stamping elephantine rumba.*

*A common cold, forsooth, gadzooks!*
*Please to forgive my ribald looks,*
*But what derision History holds*
*For the man who belittled the Cold of Colds!*

OGDEN NASH

## *In Fine*

He had had much experience of physicians, and said, "The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don't want, drink what you don't like, and do what you'd druther not."

MARK TWAIN

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# THAT POOR PASCAL

**The good folk of Nice would never dream of interfering between an armed madman and the law**

## by WILLIAM WALLACE IRWIN

THE city gaol of Nice is the present residence of an unfortunate mason named Pascal Bellerti. Pascal is small and brown, and in figure he is what might be described as tubby, for in Nice masons are not supposed to work hard enough to get thin. He is proud of a huge black moustache which he trains after the manner of the late King Humbert, and his great ambition is (or was) to go hunting. Unfortunately for Pascal there is little game of any kind in the neighbourhood of Nice, and his aspiration was slightly cramped by the fact that he had never owned a gun. He had always wanted to have one, and often when—during the noon rest—he told his comrades stories of his prowess as a hunter, he regretted that he had never fired a shot.

Now the reader should understand that Pascal does not actually and deliberately lie. Far from it; he is a most honest little man. But the sun and heat of a Mediterranean summer makes everything dance before your eyes, and when Pascal begins to relate some harmless incident of his youth, the sun so blurs the facts and changes their outlines that by the second sentence it is a hunting story, and by the third Pascal is convinced that it has all happened.

It fell on an unlucky evening that as he was leaving his work Pascal was addressed by a fellow mason named Hyacinthe . . .

"Té, Pascal. How is it that you never go hunting any more?"

"Mon bon," replied Pascal, and being a Niçois he pronounced it *bong*. "There is so little to shoot around here that when I moved into town I sold my gun." And then he added, "But I am often tempted to buy another—I am lost without a gun."

"Come with me," said his friend. "I have that which will interest you."

He led the intrigued Pascal to his lodging, and when they had entered the room he laid his finger to his lips with a mysterious air and locked the door. Pascal had no idea what it was all about, but to show his good faith he tiptoed to the window, looked cautiously up and down the street, then shut and bolted the shutters. Turning

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to his friend, he nodded his head as though to say, " It would have been dangerous to have overlooked that."

Hyacinthe clasped his hand as one whose appreciation is too deep for words, and produced from under the bed a long flat box. He laid this on the table and, holding up his hand to impose a silence that Pascal had no thought of breaking, he said in a whisper,

" You know my brother ? "

" Casimir ? The one that is smuggling ? Yes."

" Oh, my friend, don't use that word ' smuggling ' ! Casimir never liked it, and besides someone might overhear ; he always preferred to refer to himself as an ' Import and Export Agent'." Hyacinthe paused, and then added with as much solemnity as is possible in a whisper, " Casimir is the victim of treachery ! "

" Té, té," said Pascal bubbling with sympathy.

" Yes," continued Hyacinthe, " he was too clever for the French frontier guards and he could always fool the Italian customs officials, until one day they thought of the base and treacherous scheme of working together . . . and now poor Casimir is in an Italian gaol. But tell me as an honest man, was such a plan fair ? "

Deeply moved, Pascal raised his hand in the air and was about to comfort the sorrowing brother with a few fervid words, when he saw that the box was still shut; so he lowered his hand, laying it with a solemn gesture on the lid and whispering, " And this . . . ? "

" This . . . Ah, my friend, you cannot imagine the Italian gaols. Casimir writes that they lack the slightest articles of necessity. Tobacco, wine, playing-cards—everything that is needed to make life bearable—one has to supply them one's self. This—Casimir wrote me to sell it ; it is breaking his heart, but a man of the world such as he cannot exist without the necessities of life. This is his gun."

He threw back the cover and dazzled Pascal's eyes with the Nimrodian riches it contained.

" See, here is the gun in two pieces, but no need to tell *you* about that. Here are empty cartridges, here is a flask of powder, here are little sacks of shot of different sizes, here are the tools for loading—Oh, it will break my brother's heart, but how much will you give for them all ? " The whisperer stopped and wiped away a tear.

Not to be outdone in emotion, Pascal also wiped away a tear. Then, as he had not even the vestige of an idea of the value of a shotgun, he whispered,

" How much do you want for the lot ? "

" *I* ? Oh, my friend, I want nothing—I would give it to you if it were mine—but I feel sure that Casimir would not willingly take less than fifteen thousand francs for the box."

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Now our Pascal might know nothing of shotguns, but he was a Niçois, so he whispered back,

"I'll give you two thousand."

The battle being joined, the bargaining continued according to the rules of the art, voices rising higher and higher as the argument progressed, until Pascal announced,

"Your brother is a thief as well as a smuggler, and is probably hiding in an Italian gaol to avoid worse things in France. It is also notorious that when he plays cards with friends they always lose. Three thousand five hundred francs is my last offer."

He stopped, panting, for it had required some effort to outshout Hyacinthe who had been proclaiming at the same time,

"And you—*hein*—and you? Everyone knows that your father stole fish for his living, and that your aunt—*hein*—the less said about her the better! Casimir would throw the money in my face if he ever heard that I took less than six thousand five hundred francs for his beautiful gun!"

They stopped and regarded each other with respectful admiration, like two champion swordsmen who find that neither can gain the advantage over the other. Pascal spoke first.

"Five thousand francs," he said.

"Bon," said Hyacinthe, sounding the "g" nobly.

"And you pay for the wine," added Pascal.

"But certainly," assented Hyacinthe.

The next day was Sunday, but Pascal, anxious to examine his purchase, broke the habit of years and rose early. He at first experienced some difficulty in attaching the barrels to the stock, but after a few unsuccessful experiments discovered the trick. Before the small mirror that served him for his weekly shave and the daily care of his wonderful moustache, he posed with the gun. He carried it on a shoulder and he carried it over an arm; by twisting his neck he tried to see how these poses looked from the rear. He fired in the air at imaginary birds and his heart rejoiced at the brave double snap with which the hammers fell on the empty chambers. He tried the same thing again but this time shooting towards the ground at non-existent rabbits. His imagination was working splendidly and he was very happy.

Then the thought struck him that to shoot one must have cartridges, and he examined the other contents of the box. Glued to the inner side of the lid was a printed paper giving the method of using the loading tools, so Pascal sat down to further experimentation, but first as a precautionary measure he extinguished his cigarette. The instructions which described in ample detail the use of the tools, unfortunately offered no suggestion as to the

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quantity of powder and shot required. Pascal was cautious—he had heard of guns kicking and of guns bursting—so he carefully measured one-half of the smallest quantity of powder marked on the graduated charging-cup. Then there was the question of shot to be considered, but here the decision was simple—obviously the smallest shot was the least dangerous.

Keeping these decisions in mind, after about an hour of trial he succeeded in loading two shells. He slid these into his gun and seated himself at the window with the weapon lying across his knees. It should be remembered that his room was on the second floor facing on the street.

There is where his misfortunes began. If he had only followed his usual Sunday custom and gone to the café-restaurant of *The Fried She-devilfish* to sit under the awning and read *L'Eclaireur de Nice*, all might have been well and this story never told. Alas! he seated himself at the window, his mind already heated by the events of the morning, and let his imagination play with the future.

He told himself lovely and exciting tales of the quantity of birds and rabbits he would shoot, and then from birds and rabbits his fancy soared to larger game. He had vaguely heard of the wild-boar that ravaged the fields of the Var, and he pictured how he would lie in wait for the savage animal. Behind a clump of bushes he would sit with his gun cocked and ready, and when—sneaking through the brush—the grey miscreant approached, he would rise cautiously to his feet, shoulder his faithful weapon and . . .

At this very moment there passed on the opposite side of the street a maiden lady dragging behind her on a leash her pet dog, one of those fat, over-fed, bad-tempered animals of uncertain ancestry. Unfortunately the dog was grey and rough-coated . . . and Pascal had been dreaming of boar . . . And at the trial he himself could not explain how it happened that he shouldered his gun and fired!

The tiny shot with the feeble charge did no more than smartly sting the dog, but—cowardly animal that he was—he rushed forward between the legs of his owner, upsetting her on her back with a greater display of cotton stocking and undergarments than is customary with ladies of her kind.

What a tableau smote the eyes of the astonished policeman who approached cautiously after hearing the roar of the gun. On the sidewalk lay the maiden lady, her legs kicking convulsively in the air while from her mouth came sounds that curdled the milk in the laiterie a hundred metres away. From beneath her skirts protruded the head of the dog which was doing its best to howl louder than its mistress. While every window in the street contained at least two people all shouting at the same time in an endeavour to explain

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to the policeman what had occurred. This is typical of the readiness of the true Niçois to aid the authorities, as no one had witnessed the affair except poor Pascal, the dog, and the maiden lady.

The policeman approached the latter who, thinking she was shot, had shut her eyes tightly in order to devote her whole soul to kicks and clamour. He regarded her, puzzled. Was it a fit? She did not appear to be wounded. If it was a fit—he was only a humble policeman—fits might be catching. He stepped back a pace and put a hand to his pistol, and with the other he took off his little cap and scratched his head. Then he looked to heaven for inspiration and became aware that there were people at the windows, who were waving their hands and shouting. Wildly waving hands directed his attention to the window over his head and at length, amid the clamour, he caught the word fou.

Madman. What a terrible word! He turned and saw that poor Pascal standing at the window, still clutching his gun; his mouth beneath his great black moustache open with horror and amazement.

The Nice policemen are brave—you should see how they hold back the crowd when there is a fire, or how they clear the streets for a parade during the Carnival. They have been known to walk boldly into a room where only two days before a man had been murdered, but after all a madman . . . it is a case for a doctor is it not?

The policeman was of that opinion and at once went in search of one; such was his sense of duty that he wasted not an instant but ran. The maiden lady must have heard the word also, for she picked herself up with a remarkable agility and with her dog followed the policeman, both still howling. As they reached the corner of the street the dog rushed between the policeman's legs and tripped him so that he fell. Thinking that he was being attacked by that poor Pascal, with great presence of mind he shut his eyes, pulled out his pistol and fired a few shots. Fortunately he was lying on his back at the time and firing at the sky so no one was injured.

At the sound of that dreadful word fou and the noise of the pistol, all the people in the street closed and bolted their shutters and retired to the rear of the house. The good people of Nice are quiet and law-abiding folk and anxious not to interfere with the officials in the execution of their duties.

As soon as he was on his feet the officer displayed all that intelligent activity and reckless daring that one expects from such an official. He warned everyone not to go down the street. This was perhaps legal but not at all necessary; for as we have seen the Niçois would never think of interfering between a policeman and an armed madman. He then carefully noted in his little book

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the name of the street and inquired if anyone in the assembled crowd knew the name of the fou. As none of the crowd knew what had happened they were unable to answer as accurately as they could have wished. However, in an earnest effort to assist the officer, several names were suggested, all of which he wrote in his book.

Having refreshed himself with a glass of wine which the proprietor of the corner café presented as a tribute to his conduct, the *agent* turned in a fire-alarm. It is true that there was no fire at the time, but it is well to be prepared for all emergencies. Then a thought struck him, and he told a small boy to run around to the police station and tell the Captain that the Communists were rioting. This was not strictly accurate, but he knew that the Captain did not like to be disturbed while reading the morning paper, unless it were for something very important.

The Captain was a little slow in coming as, having only thirty *agents* in reserve, he naturally felt it was his duty to notify the Captain of Gendarmes that he needed reinforcements at once. All this took nearly half an hour, and indeed he had not been at the scene of the outrage more than five minutes when the firemen arrived. With all the native gallantry of the south, the Captain of Police saluted the Captain of the Firemen and, after having inquired politely about the condition of his health and that of his family, offered him the privilege of arresting that poor Pascal. The Captain of Firemen was deeply touched by the generosity of the Captain of Police, but stated that the police had won the honour by arriving first on the scene, and that he would be the last man in the world to push himself ahead of a friend.

They then called for the policeman who had sent in the alarm and had him tell his story all over again. When he had finished they looked at each other with grave faces and nodded their heads solemnly.

"It were best," said the Captain of Police, "that we let him know that we are here in force and that all resistance is useless. It will perhaps prevent needless bloodshed."

"You are right," said the Captain of Firemen, "and I for my part will squirt a hose down the street to let him know that *we* are here with our ladders and that to hide on the roof will be in vain."

The orders being given, each policeman gave his neighbour a silent handclasp of farewell, and in turn advanced and emptied his pistol down the silent street, after which the firemen squirted their biggest hose for a good ten minutes.

And what—you ask—was that poor Pascal doing? He was sitting at his window, the gun across his lap, his elbows on his

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knees and his head in his hands—despairingly trying to understand what had happened. He could not account for the shooting and still less for the stream from the fire-hose.

He was aroused from his dismal meditations by the sight of the Captain of Police who, with all the caution that distinguishes a brave man from a reckless one, was edging down the street.

Glad to have the chance of speaking to someone—for he is a friendly soul—our Pascal rose to his feet and called politely, "Bonjour, Monsieur le Capitaine."

The Captain resisted bravely a perfectly natural impulse to retire, and merely concealed himself in a doorway from which he protruded his head and responded as a gentleman should, "Good morning."

"Might I inquire," continued Pascal in his most polished manner, "what is the cause of all the shooting and why the firemen are practising on a Sunday morning?"

"It is nothing. It is nothing, I assure you," replied the Captain of Police. "I beg of you, my friend, do not excite yourself. Only . . . your shotgun, you know . . . undoubtedly it went off by accident a short time ago. Keep calm I beg of you! However, in order to maintain the tranquillity for which our city is noted, there is a law which prohibits the discharge of firearms in the city streets. Ah! I see that you are about to say that you were in the house when that shot was fired. How true. Permit me to felicitate you on the remarkable speed with which your fascinating mentality seizes the interesting legal points of the case. But in the meanwhile, and pending the time when the authorities shall have given a decision on the most delicate legal point that you have raised, perhaps it would be well if you gave the gun to me. I assure you that I will guard it with great care."

"Certainly," said Pascal. "I will bring it down to you at once."

"Oh no!" said the Captain hastily. "That is quite unnecessary. I would not think of causing you so much trouble. Just drop it in the street; I can quite well pick it up."

"As you wish, mon Capitaine. Here it is." And Pascal dropped the gun gently to the pavement.

Alas! poor Pascal had forgotten to unload it, and when it struck the stones the second shell went off with a flash and a roar.

The Captain knew his duty and did it. The city had spent many years and much money in training him for the high position that he occupied, all of which would be wasted if he allowed himself to be shot by a madman—he might even be tried for neglecting to care for municipal property—so he retired as speedily as he could.

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If his boots had not been so tight he would have made even better time.

He reached his men and was about to give an order when he saw there was a spot of blood on the back of his left hand. His sense of discipline was such that he had neglected to note that he was wounded until he had accomplished his duty and returned to his command.

But now came the reaction; he turned white, staggered, and fell into the arms of his Lieutenant. The firemen provided a litter on which the hero was placed by the loving hands of his men. They covered him with a blanket—the day was exceedingly hot, but the good fellows wanted to show how they sympathized with their wounded commander. The Captain of Firemen himself raised his friend's head and held to his lips a small glass of cognac, in order that he might have strength to wait for the arrival of the doctor.

The wounded hand lay prone on the blanket, the bright drop of blood showing plainly on the back of it, but with the other he clasped that of the Captain of Firemen while with a feeble voice he made some last requests.

At length the doctor arrived and knelt by the litter. While the wounded man bit his lip to stifle his groans, the physician, with a pin that he withdrew from the lapel of his coat, extracted the pellet of shot that had almost disappeared in the skin. And when the hand had been well bandaged and placed in a sling, the brave Captain was carried to the hospital by four of his policemen. As he passed the crowd stood uncovered in tribute to heroism, and he feebly returned the salute with his unwounded hand. It was most touching; many spectators wept openly.

And what of Pascal, you ask? Justly. We have almost forgotten Pascal in telling of the heroic conduct of the brave Captain.

When the gun went off, Pascal was horrified and threw himself on his knees to pray for the soul of the brave man he had slain, but unable to bear the silence of the street and the pangs of remorse, he ventured a glance from the window. The street was empty but at the far end there was a great crowd and much excitement. Pascal being a real Niçois, was naturally imbued with a profound sense of his duty as a citizen. Such is the sense of civic responsibility among the inhabitants of this sunlit city that if three people stop on the street to talk, every passing Niçois will haste to join them in the hope that he may contribute his mite to the enlightenment of the subject under discussion, or at least by listening keep abreast of what is going on.

Seeing by the size of the crowd that something important was taking place, Pascal patriotically put aside his own worries and

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hastened to do this duty by joining them. As all eyes were directed to the wounded officer, his approach was unnoticed and he managed to work his way to the front rank surrounding the litter. Here, as might have been expected from such a man, he aided the police by calling " Stand back ! Give him air ! " and was moved to tears by the Captain's uncomplaining heroism. Indeed so touched was he that when the Captain was carried away, he joined the crowd in uttering maledictions against the madman who had caused such suffering.

Then, seized by a sudden resolution, he approached the Lieutenant of Police and bowing politely said, " Mon Lieutenant, I place myself at your service."

The Lieutenant touched his cap and replied, " I thank you exceedingly, my good fellow ; such conduct is just what one always expects from the citizens of Nice, but my men are capable of handling the situation."

Pascal was astonished but he hesitated to go, and at last stammered, " And then . . . and then . . . you do not wish to arrest me ? "

" Arrest you, my friend ! Certainly not. Why should I ? "

" Of course," said Pascal. " I see. It was clearly an accident. When I threw the gun from the window I had no idea it would go off."

It is marvellous how military training leads to quick thinking. No sooner had Pascal spoken than the keen brain of the officer grasped the situation and acted on it. With a single leap he placed himself behind two of his men and gave them the order.

" There is the madman. Arrest him."

The two policemen, observing that Pascal had not moved, bowed to him and one of them—in a most polished manner—said, " Monsieur, you are under arrest."

Pascal heaved a deep sigh, for he had never been arrested before, and approached the *agents* holding out his hands for the manacles. As he approached the policemen backed away, holding up their palms in protest.

" Oh no, Monsieur ! That is quite unnecessary we assure you—come no nearer—we could not think of such an indignity—please go in the other direction and precede us down the street towards the police station."

So Pascal led the way down the middle of the street ; behind him, and far enough behind to show that they trusted to his honour and had no fear of his escaping, came the police, and they in turn were followed by the firemen. On either side were clustered the cheering citizens. It moved the emotions and made one think of Marshal Foch leading the Victory Parade.

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When he had entered the police station Pascal stopped and so did the advancing police. With a most exquisite urbanity, the Lieutenant called from the doorway,

"Will you have the kindness to enter the corridor on your right and occupy the first empty cell that takes your fancy."

"And shut the cell door behind you," whispered a sergeant.

And that is how that poor Pascal comes to be spending six months in gaol. The reader can see how free he was from all intention of evil, so the blame must rest on that fierce and wicked southern sun.

* * *

## *LADIES AND GENTLEMEN*

IN these days of rapid advancement when nearly every woman is called a "lady" perhaps we may term those to be seen of a morning or afternoon promenading Regent Street, Bond Street, Piccadilly, and Oxford Street—ladies. But they can safely be said not to be *gentlewomen*, a distinction of much potency. Or, if they are, then they have degraded sadly from the traditional precepts of their mothers—therefore, I say that English ladies do not walk in the streets of London—*shop* streets, of course, I mean.

*Good Form in England*, 1888

Englishmen have an astonishing ocular performance called a "stare"—a sort of fixed, vague look as if the eyes were lost in space. This look implies that the "person" who is the object of it does not exist, so that the gentleman's eyes take on the expression of someone who is looking at nothing.

SALVADOR DE MADARIAGA

Representatives of the Ever Thirsty are still around. One accosted me in Berkeley Square today as "one Old Public Schoolboy to another." I asked him what Public School. "Eton," he replied promptly. I gave the beery humbug a shilling. A little later on another corner of the same Square the same Old Public Schoolboy accosted me. This time, in reply to my query, he said, "Winchester." "But half an hour ago, on the other side of the Square, you were at Eton! You've come down in the world," I said. "So I have, sir!" he replied cheerily, and fled. Old Wykehamists forgive me.

CECIL ROBERTS, *One Year of Life*

*High people, Sir, are the best.*

DR. JOHNSON

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# CAPTIVE BRIDE

## "Shoot when the monkeys speak of coming night," said Mopusisi

### by ARTHUR J. BURKS

MOPUSISI lived in the heart of Brazil, as all his people had for generations; but they did not know the country by that name, nor did he. As he knew it and they told it, he lived near the River Coloured Like Parrots, between two rivers that ran into it, the River Where the Alligators Sleep in the Sun, and the River of the Quacking Ducks.

His maloca, or family place, was in the shadow of the Mountain of the Red Macaw's Nest, and he belonged to the "white" clan. Since he could not marry within his own clan, and there were as yet no women old enough in the "red" clan, his situation was difficult, but by no means insoluble.

He was a Mundurucu and a hunter of heads. His black hair was cut short around his head, covering his ears. It parted naturally in the middle. A tattoo mask of dark green covered his face to his upper lip, deep green lines of it running into his hair and down his neck to meet other lines that circled his body to below the knees.

Between the lines below his neck were rows of green triangles, signifying fish-heads swinging on withes, to bring good fortune in fishing, good fortune in the breeding of sons and daughters. Save for a loin-cloth and his knife and bow and arrows, the bow two feet taller than himself, the arrows at least as long, Mopusisi was naked. He was five feet seven inches tall, stocky, sturdy, powerful, and courageous.

The year was 1860. He never dreamed that his children would one day be able to read and write, and add and subtract figures; that they would be married in white man's churches; that the bride he had yet to procure would become his bride in the church before their grandchildren were grown; that by the time he died he himself would speak a tongue he had never heard and would be able to read and write it a little.

All that he knew now was that he must have a wife to make his gardens, care for his chickens, dogs, pigs, prepare his meals and rear his children. And in the Mundurucu tribe, at this time,

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there was unfortunately none to be had. He had spoken of the matter with his father. He was old enough to hunt by night, to send an arrow through the biggest jaguar or tapir; old enough to marry and bring sons and daughters into the world. Sons were necessary that the Mopu family might endure; daughters were necessary to bring strong sons-in-law into the family.

"There is no wife for me," he told his father, in the soft, gentle, musical language of his people.

"There are Cajabis," suggested his father. "Their women are strong."

Mopusisi shook his head. "Their skin is too white," he said. His own mother had been Cajabi, but she was as dark as a Mundurucu. To all their neighbours the Mundurucus were known as "black faces," and the name was a symbol of terror.

"The Apiacas, then?" said his father.

"They eat people," said Mopusisi thoughtfully, "but the women are strong. They are not wise, though."

"Women who can be taught to obey need not be wise," said his father. "They are strong to raise strong Mundurucus. The Apiacas then? You know the story that a strong family of them has moved into the land of the River Where the Fox Was Drowned under a Stone?"

Mopusisi nodded.

"The Apiacas, then," said Mopusisi, "though men who eat men are less than monkeys, who do not eat each other!"

"We can teach her our culture, my son," said his father. "Be sure to bring the head of one of her close relatives."

Five young Mundurucus, including Mopusisi and led by him, composed the capture party. Like Mopusisi they wanted brides. The capture party was a war party, too, for it was certain the Apiacas would fight. They would be surprised; they would have to fight. Bride capture without fighting meant a bride that did not bear children and so was a reproach to her husband.

The five young men, travelling fast and light, living off the country, hurried south and east toward the River Where the Fox Was Drowned under a Stone. They did not pause to cook food. They ate wild honey. They caught the big queens of the leaf-cutting ants, pulled off their wings, and ate the living creatures. They drank from streams as they swam them, like fish in the water. Their speed was almost a run as the fever of the chase entered into them, and they came nearer and nearer to the spot where the Apiacas had settled. Days and nights ran together, and they did not sleep.

They crossed the invisible boundary into Apiaca territory when

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it was nearly sundown. They were silent, invisible, as men must be who would surprise the Apiacas. Fortune favoured them in that all the Apiacas were gathered together. They were feasting, and the Mundurucus knew they feasted on men. They were like wild beasts. The gathering seemed to be especially festive.

Mopusisi knew the tongue of the Apiacas, and he crept close to find out what was going on. When he returned to his hiding fellows, not having aroused the slightest suspicion among the Apiacas, he was smiling.

"It is a marriage party," he said. "The bride is my woman! There are women for us all. We shall attack when the ururu, the monkey with double eyes, begins chanting."

The Mundurucus enjoyed the jest of stealing a bride before she could become a bride, and making her the bride of another man, without bothering to ask her. Of course, when a man married in his own tribe, he proposed formally. But these people were merely Apiacas, eaters of men. They even ate their own people who gave offence and had to be killed!

"Pick each of you a man," said Mopusisi, "and shoot when the monkeys speak of coming night."

There was gross laughter, dancing, and loud talk near the central fire in the Apiaca village. The five Mundurucus waited, arrows nocked. They always attacked when the ururu sounded. Their neighbours all knew that. The Apiacas would be silent a moment, instinctively waiting, fearful. Then arrows would fly.

Bows were lifted, for it was almost time. Mopusisi selected targets for the five.

Away in the jungle the ururu began his rising, numerous growls. The five arrows flew. They pierced five men, remained affixed in them. The Mundurucus rose and charged, firing again. Mopusisi was comforted by the feel of his knife against his hip.

Five more arrows. Then an arrow came from among the confused Apiacas, and Huetinbin would need no wife. It went through his throat. Mopusisi noted that it was the Apiaca bridegroom who fired it. He smiled. He saw the prospective bride break away, race for the cover of a hut.

The Apiacas were screaming, "Black Faces!" with something between despair and high courage in their voices.

Mopusisi, knowing the three Mundurucus who still lived would protect him, closed on the doomed bridegroom. They met with a shock of knives, in a fight to the death. Both knew it was for possession of the bride. The bride knew it, too, and would soon try to escape through the rear of the hut. She must not escape.

Mopusisi must make the kill fast. He was proud of the high courage, the fighting ability of the man he was going to kill, for

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these things added to the value of the head that was to be taken. The Apiaca fought him to the last instant, when Mopusisi's knife slipped between his ribs into his heart. Courage was still on his face when he died; even a half smile was there, as if he wished his conqueror good fortune in his forthcoming marriage.

Then Mopusisi rose from the dead man, knowing his friends would respect his rights to the head, and gave chase to the bride. It was two hours before he caught her, and all the way back to the side of the man to whom she would have been a bride this very night, she fought Mopusisi like a jaguar with young. Nothing could have pleased Mopusisi more. Possibly, though the thought would never have occurred to Mopusisi, the girl knew this.

The Mundurucus remained in victorious possession of the maloca and of five women. One must go back for the dead Mundurucu, to "carry seed" for him by a close relative. The women, save for Mopusisi's bride, seemed undisturbed, quiescent.

Mopusisi took the head of the erstwhile bridegroom, while the bride looked calmly on. Mopusisi held her by the wrist with the hand that did not hold the knife. The girl, about his own age, fought him all the way back to the Mountain of the Red Macaw's Nest, while the three other Mundurucus watched enviously.

When they were home, he flung her into the hut that had been built for him. She would not stay. He fought her until she was too exhausted to run. Every day, while he worked on the head of the man she would have married, he had to fight her to make her do the woman's work that needed to be done. If it had not been woman's work he would have done it himself, and saved much time and strength. But a woman must learn.

He shrank the head and ornamented it with tassels, with rings in the ears, a block of rare beautiful stone in the nostrils, another in the lower lip. He tried to retain the expression of the face and eyes. The eyes were difficult, but he took pride in his art. Shining black stones took the place of the eyes. They did very well.

Actually, the Apiaca girl was not yet his wife. No "planting of blood and name" had taken place. Mopusisi was beginning to wonder if he was ever really going to win her. He thought of it often, as he prepared the head, and spoke softly to the spirit of the man who had once proudly possessed it.

"We shall prosper, we three," he said to the spirit. "With your courage added to mine, your fighting spirit and mine added to hers, we shall rear a great family of strong sons and daughters."

"Yes," he was sure the spirit of the head replied, "it is so. But she is stubborn and filled with fire. She may never give you anything but battle and trouble. You may have to kill her."

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" We Mundurucus do not kill our unruly wives ! " said Mopusisi. " You are a barbarian, my friend ! "

" Perhaps," he thought the spirit answered, " when I am born again I shall ask to be a Black Face."

The head was finished. It was very beautiful, he thought; almost as beautiful as the Apiaca woman, now that she had been tattooed after the Mundurucu fashion—much against her will.

He took the head into the hut. The girl, to whom he had given the name of Pusureatem, stood proudly against the rear wall of the wattled dwelling, her hands behind her, her usual attitude before battle. Mopusisi placed the head in a niche he had prepared for it, like a shrine. Now all things had been done save one, without which there would never be sons or daughters. The greatest test of all was at hand. He turned to the girl, took a deep breath, ready to renew the battle that already seemed endless.

Pusureatem was looking fixedly at the shining hair of the head, at the black sparkling eyes, the wealth of ornaments. Something soft began to show in her face and eyes. For almost the first time she spoke to Mopusisi without anger, without calling him evil names in Apiaca.

" It is beautiful," she said, " beautiful as the sun that rises or the sun that sinks at night."

He held his breath. She looked a little longer at the head. Then she looked back at Mopusisi.

" It is great good fortune," she said softly, " that we shall always have him with us. He is good, kind, strong, brave."

She said no more. There was no more to say.

* * *

## *BEARDING THE LION*

A most improbable anecdote about the late George Bernard Shaw concerns an evening when a lady dramatist lured him to the first night of her play. " Now, you naughty man," she said kittenishly, " you're not to sneak out in the middle of my drama." Shaw was planked down behind her and leaned forward to get a better view. Halfway through the first act, the authoress felt a tickling sensation on her neck. Groping in the dark, she felt a loose strand of hair and tucked it into place with a hairpin. Suddenly Shaw, now thoroughly bored, leaned back in his seat. He cried, " Ouch." Then he told the authoress, " Madam, if you will kindly take my beard out of your hair, I promise I won't budge until your confounded play is over."

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# HAT-TRICK

**Oh, I could write a sonnet**
**About your Easter bonnet . . .**

IRVING BERLIN

Then on toppes of these stately turrets (I meane their goodley heades, wherein is more vanitie than true philosophie, nowe and then) stand their other capitall ornaments, as French-hoode, hatte, cappe, hercher, and such like, some of this colour, some of that, accordyng to the variable phantasies of their serpentine mindes. And to suche excesse it is growne, as euery artificer's wife will not sticke to goe in her hat of veluet euery day, euery merchant's wife, and meane gentlewoman, in her French-hoode, and euery poore cottager's daughter in her taffatie hat; but howe they come by this (so they haue it) they care not.

PHILIP STUBBES,
*The Anatomie of Abuses*, 1583

## *Top Knot*

*BONNET! fashioned so divinely,*
*Whom I gaze at from afar,*
*Deck'd with Cluny lace so finely,*
*Plate? or tantalizing star?*
*Fasten'd round with chains of metal,*
*Furbelow'd with puffs of net,*
*Room for one wee rose's petal,*
*How much smaller will you get?*

*Author Unknown, from The Battle of the Bonnets, circa* 1865

## *Breakfast Surprise*

One morning Mr. Salteena came down to brekfast and found Ethel had come down first which was strange. Is the tea made Ethel he said rubbing his hands. Yes said Ethel and such a quear shaped parcel has come for you. Yes indeed it was a quear shape parcel it was a hat box tied down very tight and a letter stuffed between the string. Well well said Mr. Salteena parcels do turn quear I will read the letter first and so saying he tore open the letter and this is what it said

MY DEAR ALFRED, I want you to come for a stop with me so I have sent you a top hat wraped up in tishu paper inside the

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box. Will you wear it staying with me because it is very uncommon. Please bring one of your young ladies whichever is the prettiest in the face.

I remain Yours truely

BERNARD CLARK

Well said Mr. Salteena I shall take you to stay Ethel and fancy him sending me a top hat. Then Mr. S. opened the box and there lay the most splendid top hat of a lovly rich tone rarther like grapes with a ribbon round compleat.

DAISY ASHFORD, *The Young Visiters*

## *Overheads*

*A cap like a bat,*
*(Which was once a cravat)*
*Part gracefully platted and pinn'd is ;*
*Part stuck upon gauze,*
*Resembles mackaws,*
*And all the fine birds of the Indies.*

CHRISTOPHER ANSTEY,
*New Bath Guide*, 1776

## *Mannequin Parade*

Until that afternoon I had been a little vague about the meaning of "accessories." I had mistily supposed that it meant—at least when combined with the word "hats"—appendages like veils, or adjustable clips in paste or metal. But now when I saw one of these slowly revolving, big-eyed beauties making sinuous movements with arms enclosed in long gloves made of string and trimmed with beads of coral, and another wearing a broad belt of blue leather set with alternate looking-glasses and bunches of artificial white currants, and a third carrying a bag made of something like cellophane to which there seemed to have been gummed something like a crucified vampire-bat of black patent-leather, I recognized not only the Toby touch, but the full significance of his word "accessories." Not that these objects were more striking than some of those worn by the guests ; nor were the wearers of the goods for sale in every case more fetching than the potential customers—indeed, I quickly found that almost the only way to distinguish between them was that the invited persons were carrying cocktail glasses or smoking cigarettes and the models were not.

WILLIAM PLOMER, *Museum Pieces*

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## *No Lady*

One bright summer morning some weeks later, he reappeared with a brightly trimmed hat box in his hand and, after finding that Scarlett was alone in the house, he opened it. Wrapped in layers of tissue was a bonnet, a creation that made her cry: "Oh, the darling thing!" as she reached for it. Starved for the sight, much less the touch of new clothes, it seemed the loveliest bonnet she had ever seen. It was of dark-green taffeta, lined with watered silk of a pale-jade colour. The ribbons that tied under the chin were as wide as her hand and they, too, were pale green. And, curled about the brim of this confection was the perkiest of green ostrich plumes.

"Put it on," said Rhett, smiling . . .

"Oh, Rhett, whose bonnet is it? I'll buy it. I'll give you every cent I've got for it." . . .

"I don't want any money for it," he said. "It's a gift."

Scarlett's mouth dropped open. The line was so closely, so carefully drawn where gifts from men were concerned.

"Candy and flowers, dear," Ellen had said time and again, "and perhaps a book of poetry or an album or a small bottle of Florida water are the only things a lady may accept from a gentleman. Never, never any expensive gift, even from your fiancé. And never any gift of jewelry or wearing apparel, not even gloves or handkerchiefs. Should you accept such gifts, men would know you were no lady and would try to take liberties."

"Oh, dear," thought Scarlett, looking first at herself in the mirror and then at Rhett's unreadable face. "I simply can't tell him I won't accept it. It's too darling. I'd—I'd almost rather he took a liberty, if it was a very small one." Then she was horrified at herself for having such a thought and she turned pink.

MARGARET MITCHELL, *Gone With the Wind*

## *Beauty of Bath*

*Hir coverchiefs ful fyne were of ground;*
*I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound*
*That on a Sonday were upon hir head . . .*

GEOFFREY CHAUCER, *The Canterbury Tales*

## *Haute Couture*

I spyed out among my country neighbours Mrs. De Salis, covered with Diamonds in a flappitty Cap.

ELIZABETH WYNNE, *Diary*, 1805

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# THE GUARDIANS

**"If ever I should know," she said, "I will send you a message wherever you may be"**

## by PAUL GALLICO

NOT long ago I had occasion to pass through Lymnet on the Kentish coast, east of Dover, and I dined of course with Sir Percival and Lady Ryene, at Ryene Manor, where Sir Percival was enjoying his annual holiday from Parliament.

They welcomed me as an old friend for I had served with Ryene during the war, and Lady Ryene I have known ever since she was a little girl named Geordie Simmons in pinafore smock and pigtails, playing about the village or down by the tidal pools near the sea.

It was good to be with people with whom pleasant memories could be revived, but even more, in these hard and cynical times, it was a delight to see a wedded couple married more than six years still deeply and touchingly in love.

It manifested itself in a hundred innocent and charming ways—the tone of voice in which they addressed each other, the way the eyes of each would come to rest momentarily upon the other's face and fill with tenderness; a smile, an inclination of the head, the secret exchange of a look, a colouring of the cheek, everything testifying to how dearly they cherished each other and the pleasure they derived from each other's company.

I was reminded of their strange love story and their belief in the extraordinary thing that had happened during the war to bring them together. Surely no woman ever directed to her suitor a more weird, beautiful or timely message that he was alone in her heart and beloved into eternity, than Geordie Simmons sent winging out over the waters of the English Channel, beneath whose waves Percival Ryene was a prisoner of death.

For, while you will find in the files of the Admiralty an accurate account and record of what happened to the midget two-man submarine *Conger*, on the night of May 18th, 1944, via the report of Lt. Commander Sir Percival Ryene, Bart., D.S.C. and Bar, R.N.V.R., and attested to by his rating, Torpedoman First Class Arthur Billop, as stolid and unimaginative a British seaman as ever downed the King's grog at the barrelhead, there is yet another

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story behind this strange occurrence. And once more seeing Sir Percival and his lady together, guarding their love as a miracle, reminded me of how it had all begun.

When Geordie Simmons was a little girl living in a cottage outside the seaside village of Lymnet just above where the Kentish coast begins to flatten out from the massive walls of the chalk cliffs of Dover to the long stretches of beach by Hacklinge and Sandown Castle, the old prayer she had been taught to say every night was the one that Humperdinck immortalized in his fairy opera, *Hansel and Gretel.* It began :

*Two white angels at my feet,*
*Watch o'er me when I'm asleep ;*
*Two white angels at my head,*
*Vigil o'er my soul will keep.*
*Two angels at my side arrayed . . .*

and when she closed her eyes she felt secure that they were there in guardianship.

Once at Christmas-time, she was taken to London with her cousin Percy Ryene to see the opera itself, and they sat spellbound as she watched her nightly prayer come to life just as she imagined it. There were the two children, Hansel and Gretel, lost in the forest after dark, and as Gretel sang her prayer of faith and asked the Lord for protection, the stage darkened and, two by two, the angels descended a golden staircase, their white wings spread, and ranged themselves about the sleeping children.

This was the kind of childhood Geordie Simmons had, filled with golden dreams and simple faith and all the tenderness and simplicity of a little girl growing up happily in a small village surrounded by the splendours of the sea and the deep innocence of nature.

The pinafore stage gave way to shy, long-legged girlhood startled by its first contacts with the adult world yet secure in the warmth and friendliness of her companions in the small village. Young Percy Ryene was one of these ; so were Alec Hastings, the big, laughing boy who later went into the Royal Air Force ; sensitive Peter Welch, whose dry-point etchings of the sea and the dunes around Lymnet would one day become famous ; and handsome Alistair Coombs, the wealthiest of them all. Each in his way loved Geordie and knew that it was the kind of love that would be with him until the day he died.

As she grew up, she was not a great beauty, but in the clarity of her brow, the depth and lustre of her eyes, and the inner sweetness expressed by her sensitive mouth and fine features, she personified

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man's dearest dreams of woman. Her femininity and frank, natural appeal belied the masculine name bestowed upon her. Half of Lymnet was head-over-heels in love with her. When she walked by the sea of a summer's evening with her brown hair rippling down her back and the wind off the Straits moulding her cotton frock to the sweet lines of her figure, she brought a catch to the throat and a yearning to every male heart.

And Geordie cared for none of them, or thought she did not, for while she loved many things—the wind-scudded clouds, the stars peeping forth after a storm, the red poppies in the cornfields, the twisty-windy lanes wriggling past old thatched cottages squatting at their sides, the sun and the sea and every living thing that flew through the air, swam in the sea or scurried bright and beady-eyed through the undergrowth—love of man she did not yet know or understand.

They were all her dear companions and she was not above bestowing a kiss or two for their happiness' sake, but she had not yet been awakened, nor had her heart been touched. That many of them were in sorry plight over her was quite evident, but was there ever a true woman troubled by this? She seemed to know by instinct that it was man's fate always to be in a state over some woman or other and that it might as well be over her.

She gauged and accepted their love with the spendthrift nature of a young girl with all her life before her. Thus she did not measure the depth of feeling that Percy Ryene had for her, or his qualities as a man. But then she was living in a world of her own creation and had not yet that contact with reality that came later. It was still a world where the angels descended from heaven to watch over her at night and God was to be found in a tree, or in the rippling of the grass atop the dunes, or in the thunderous voice of the surf, and all things inanimate as well as animate whispered their confidences to her.

Percival Ryene (at the death of his father to become Sir Percival), was a quiet, slender boy, as dark-haired as a Frenchman, as the Frenchman, in fact, who had come over from Normandy almost nine hundred years before to fight in the battle of nearby Hastings, and who was his ancestor. Ryene Manor was no more than a stone's throw from the sea and the boy grew up as much at home in the water as he was on the land.

Because Percy Ryene had something of the poet in him, his love for Geordie touched him more deeply and left more serious scars. Perhaps because of things his Norman blood remembered he was better able to understand and evaluate her and thus to know what he was losing, for, since love him she did not, then surely she must love another. Because they had grown up together, she had entered

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deeply into his soul. Never again was he able to come in contact with beauty—music, or sunset, spring rain or the sonorous roll of great verse, without being moved to think upon Geordie.

There was no better fighter than Percy Ryene in any kind of match, but what manner of battle was to be waged when a girl refused to give or was incapable of giving her heart? A caul of virgin enchantment lay about Geordie like a spell cast in an old forest. She communed with things of other worlds, but not with men.

The tides etched the passage of time on the sands of Lymnet. Boys became men, and girls turned into women. The world went to war again. Sir Percival came up from Dartmouth, where he had been training, to see Geordie Simmons once more before he went away to join his command in the North Sea.

They went together down to the big tidal pool at Stairhole cove just above where the sea had breached the chalk and limestone and made an arch, the Bishop's Mitre, through which the green combers sucked and roared. There, where they had spent so many happy days as children, the man pleaded his love with all the eloquence and searching anguish which the human soul can impart to human chords.

He said to her, "Geordie, there never has been a time when I have not loved you. You entered my heart as a child and I have held you there ever since. If you cannot love me, I think it will die within me."

She sat silently beside the pool that mirrored her reflection and did not answer him.

He said to her further, "Shall I tell you how beautiful you are in my eyes?" And when she did not demur, he continued, "It is like all things of heaven and earth combined, water and fire and wind, summer and winter, the falling of raindrops, the sun glowing in an icicle: as deep and dark as this pool and as tumultuous in my soul as the surf. Dearest Geordie—surely you know how great is my desire and need of you."

She raised her brown head and looked at him with grave eyes, and in them he did not doubt that he read the end of all his hopes, for they were neither melting nor even misted with the tears that move with the emotions when the well-springs of the heart are opened; they were only troubled and disturbed.

She placed her hand gently upon his arm and looked at him long and searchingly, studying his dark eyes and lean, sensitive face and the strong Ryene nose and jaw. She gazed at him as though to absorb his features, and all the love and longing they expressed, within herself so that perhaps there they might find some answering note, some stirring, some whisper that could

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unlock the riddle of where, when and with whom her heart lay.

But she could only shake her head sadly and say to him, " Dear Percy. I am sorry. I am so very sorry."

He did then what any man would have done. He took her in his arms and covered her eyes and mouth with questing and desperate kisses. Momentarily she returned his caresses with frank, breathless passion and he knew that he might have taken her then and there. But when he looked into her eyes past the veil of awakened desire to the deep pools beyond, he could not find his image mirrored there. He had succeeded only in arousing her senses. Her soul yet escaped him. Therefore he spared her—and himself too.

He asked her the oldest of questions that lie between man and woman, " Geordie, is there then someone else ? "

She did not reply at once, but tried to look within herself to find the answer. Four times during that very week she had been asked the same question. For a moment her thoughts strayed from the miserable, unhappy man at her side to wondering whether she was different from other women in that she could not make up her mind, and whether she would ever know. And she was genuinely grieved that she could not give the reply that he sought.

She said, " I don't know, Percy. I would tell you if I did."

Like all men who hear those words, he chose to believe that she was not speaking the truth, for vanity allows the woman of our desires no neutrality. " Ah, then there is ! " he cried. " It's Alistair. He's rich and has everything a woman could love. Or Peter, who will be a great artist some day ; or even Alec, for his gaiety. Women like men who laugh."

She reviewed these young men in her thoughts as he named them, seeking for the answer she could not find. But she came upon a curious flash of insight as though forewarned by the subconscious that her decision would be no ordinary one when it was made. She repeated again slowly, " I—don't—know," and then added, " but if ever I do, Percy, I will send you a message, wherever you may be."

And with that he had to be content. He took his defeat like a man. Rising from the side of the pool and drawing her to her feet beside him, he kissed her in benison and said, " Good luck, Geordie." They clung to each other for a brief moment and then he entered his car and drove away to join his station in the north.

In 1943 Lt. Commander Ryene transferred to the Department of Underwater Warfare, the frogmen—swimmers, divers, obstacle-removers and operators of the newly developed two-man submarines destined for particularly hazardous tasks of reconnaissance and sub-surface attack. Sir Percival was fully aware of the high incidence of deaths in this service, and quite expected to be killed

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in it, but since he was no closer to winning Geordie Simmons—indeed, it was even more hopeless if rumour was to be believed—he did not much care.

He had heard only indirectly from Geordie since the beginning of the war, via chance encounters with people who came from the vicinity of Lymnet; once that she was engaged to Peter Welch and later, from another source, that she was going to marry Alistair Coombs when he returned from Africa. He learned also that she had become an officer in the WAAF and was stationed at Angleby just west of Dover.

With the date set for the Allied invasion of France it became imperative that a daylight reconnaissance of the underwater obstacles and possible mine-fields off Omaha and Utah beaches be carried out, and Sir Percival volunteered for the task after three teams had fallen victim to mines and had failed to come back. Were he to succeed it would mean the possible saving of thousands of lives. The odds called for the gamble.

The two-man midget submarine was practically nothing but a giant torpedo with space for a man forward to observe and steer and another in the after-engine compartment to take directions on trim and dive and speeds forward and in reverse. There was only room to crawl about in the cramped space and both men worked from the prone position.

On the morning of May 18th, 1944, the mother ship, H.M.S. *Goldfish*, set out from Portsmouth with the tiny submersible in its hold, to save oxygen and fuel, for it ran on storage batteries. Under cover of mist she approached to within ten miles of the French coast off Cherbourg, where she discreetly lowered the *Conger* with its two-man crew consisting of Commander Sir Percival Ryene and Torpedoman First Class Arthur Billop into the choppy sea, and as discreetly retired.

Sir Percival set a course for Omaha Beach, as yet unbaptized, just east of Grandcamp, and arrived there without incident. The Germans had sown vast and dangerous mine-fields all up and down the French coast at unpredictable intervals, but Ryene discovered none off Omaha all the way down to Arromanches, and that piece of information alone was worth six divisions to the Allied High Command—always provided he could get back with it.

He had plotted every underwater obstacle on the sloping shelf when in mid-afternoon his luck turned. A high-flying Nazi reconnaissance plane caught a glimpse of their long, cigar-shaped shadow lying in the shallows, and reported it to the fast motor torpedo boats based at Le Havre. They came out in force for the kill.

Sir Percival went westward in an attempt to throw them off the

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trail rather than risk a cross-channel dash for home, but two of them tracked him down sonically, herded him in close to shore below St. Mere Eglise, where there is a small, protected bay, and depth-charged him.

Sir Percival went to the bottom at fourteen fathoms and lay there with his companion, sweating out the shuddering concussions of the depth charges that were being laid in pattern about him.

He had ordered Billop to silence the engines in order to frustrate the listening devices of the enemy, thus forcing the Nazis to bomb blind. However, this also put him at the mercy of the powerful sweep of the tides which by nightfall would race in and out of the bay with speed and force. It was then six o'clock in the evening. As a skilled commander, Sir Percival played with fortune to win himself a fifty-fifty chance of escape. His game was to lie doggo until the last possible moment, on the chance that the M.T.B.s would eventually tire of the chase and go home.

At one o'clock in the morning, with an hour's supply of oxygen still left in the tanks, Sir Percival cautiously nosed his way due north by magnetic compass. A moment later there came an ominous scraping along the upper part of the shell of the submarine and the sweat broke from every pore of the Commander's body. He shouted a " Full speed astern ! " via his throat microphone in order to take the pressure off the cable that would be pulling down on the contact mine to which it was attached.

The reversing screw bit; simultaneously, Sir Percival rolled his craft with the lifting plane, and the scraping stopped. But they had come within an ace of being blown to pieces. He ordered the engines idle and the tanks flooded to settle them to the bottom.

When they had come to rest again he switched on the powerful searchlight forward and confirmed his worst fears. The tide had swept them into the centre of a mine-field. They were as good as dead. The Nazi, who was especially sensitive to submarines and their blind spots, knew his business. It was impossible to get through his patterns without a chart.

Ryene said, " Billop ! "

" Aye, aye, sir."

" Sorry, old man. I'm afraid we've bought it."

" Mines, sir ? "

" Yes. The tide carried us. We're in the thick of 'em."

" That's what I thought it was when I 'eard that scrapin' a moment ago." The rating fell silent for an instant and then Sir Percival heard his voice cheerily metallic over the intercom: " That's all right, sir. We're all due to go at one time or another.

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It isn't as though you could go on living forever by avoiding trouble. How much time have we left, sir ? "

Sir Percival consulted his watch and the gauge of the oxygen supply. " About forty-five minutes or so."

" Aye, aye, sir ! "

It was no use trying to nose along the channel bed for the land fell away from the shore in a series of shelves and the Nazis mined in tiers. Underwater, the *Conger* was blind below as well as above. With death then a matter of less than an hour, Sir Percival's mind turned to Geordie Simmons, for it was she he wanted by his side and all about him, filling his mind with her beloved presence when the moment came to die.

Lying there in the closely confined darkness of the shell that was to be their tomb, amidst the reek of oil and machinery and the acid smell of batteries, he re-created Geordie. He saw again the exquisite grotesqueries of her little body when as a child she had fled a breaking wave snapping at her ankles ; he recalled her in pinafore and pigtails when she was nothing but a pair of huge eyes and a frog mouth. He remembered the day she had first piled her mass of brown hair atop her head and played at being a woman. There were so many Geordies, all of them cherished and loved beyond endurance. He realized, almost with a sense of relief, that soon there would be nothing more to endure.

He summoned now the grown girl and in the darkness made her bright presence so vivid it seemed almost as though he might reach out his hand and touch her. This was the Geordie as he had last seen her where the surf came roaring through the Bishop's Mitre, so exquisite, dear and tender a woman, achingly lovely in face and figure and filled with that glow of beauty, that enveloping spirit which strikes more deeply into the heart of man than any passion or desire of the flesh.

To her, he sent forth his farewell. He whispered : " Good-bye, Geordie ! Good-bye, my dearest. There was not any of me that did not love you. There was not any of me that would not have served you to the end of your days." And having done this he felt he was prepared to die. However, there was the matter of method that crossed his mind. He looked at his watch. The hands registered fifteen minutes to death.

He clicked the intercom and called, " Billop ! "

" Aye, aye, sir ! "

" How'll you have it, old chap ? Lie here and choke to death when the oxygen gives out or nose about and get blown to bits ? "

After a moment of silence for reflection : " Blown, sir, if it's all the same to you."

" Right you are, old fellow. Turn 'em over."

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The high whine of the motor sounded through the dark shell. "Full speed ahead! Good-bye, Billop!"

"Good-bye, sir."

Sir Percival called up the dear face of Geordie projected ahead of him in his mind and steered straight for it, content to dissolve thus into flame, water and oblivion. But the wheel pressed against his fingers and his instinct told him he was turning. He flipped on the hooded navigation light and his needle indicator registered that they were bending five degrees to port. The sailor in him took over. He called back, "Billop! What's got into the rudder?"

"Nothing, sir. Why, what's wrong?"

"I'm holding dead on, but she's turning to port."

"Perhaps you're alongside an obstruction, sir."

"No. Something's pressing on the rudder. I can feel it in the wheel. It's as though we're being pushed."

"Try her a few points to starboard, sir."

"I can't. She won't respond."

"There's nothing wrong aft, sir. The cables are taut."

"Billop! Have you shifted the rudder now? We're turning ten degrees starboard beyond what I'm holding."

"Not me, sir. Most curious that is, sir." Both had quite forgotten the imminence of death in their professional interest in the phenomenon that appeared to be taking place.

There was a bumping and scraping. If it was a mine cable the next instant would bring the blinding globe of fire, the roar. But it was not.

Sir Percival shouted, "Billop!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"I've the strangest feeling we're being guided!"

"By what, sir?"

"I don't know. But we're being led. The wheel is turning in my hands. We've been on a starboard reach, but now it's five degrees to port."

"Why don't you have a look, sir?"

It made no difference now whether the Commander showed his lights. He switched them on. Ahead he saw the dark line of a mine cable, but on either side of his bow two large, shadowy shapes were swimming. They were long and dark grey in the yellow searchlight beam and had curious flattish snouts. They swung to starboard, avoiding the cables. There was the soft bumping and scraping again, and the *Conger* was forced to port and followed them.

"Half speed! Half speed, in Heaven's name!" Sir Percival cried. "They're porpoises, Billop!"

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"Porpoises, did you say, sir?". And then after a moment Billop added, "The sailor's friend."

"They're swimming on either side of the bows. They seem to be leading us."

Billop switched on the after lights for an instant and applied himself to the stern port. He said, "There's two on either side of the stern as well, sir. And I dare say from the scraping and bumping there's another pair amidships."

A distant melody, faint and half forgotten, began to sound within Sir Percival. In the excitement of the discovery he did not listen to it. "But why? Why are they doing it?"

Billop repeated, "They're said to be the sailor's best friend, sir. They've been known to guide a ship away from the rocks in a fog, or lead it into port."

Sir Percival said, "In Thy hands, then, dear God!" and took his fingers from the wheel.

He switched off the searchlight beam. At once the two huge mammals swimming ahead began to glow with phosphorescence that outlined their wondrous shapes in shining white and drifted back in long trailers of light. And now another name was alive in his heart and the remembered melody was singing in his brain:

*Two white angels at my feet,*
*Watch o'er me when I'm asleep;*
*Two white angels at my head,*
*Vigil o'er my soul will keep.*

Again he was in the stalls at the opera holding the hand of a small child as they watched the angels descend the golden stairs. It was Geordie's prayer!

*Geordie! Geordie!* he cried within himself. *You've sent them to me! It is the message you promised me.*

They turned, port, port, starboard, port again and then starboard twice. Once they felt themselves gently nudged from below and the Commander as in a dream responded with the elevators. The hideous black-knobbed shape of a mine drifted past.

He must have got through to Geordie. In a vision he seemed to see her awakened in the night, aware of his need for her, his cry in the dark. And she had prayed for him, the prayer of her childhood faith. Would any prayer but that filled with the anguish of love, recognized and deeply experienced, have the power to command God's angels of the sea?

"If ever I know, Percy, I will send you a message, wherever you may be."

Twisting and turning through the deadly lanes, forward they

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drove. The phosphorescence had died away. The wheel ceased to turn and for several minutes they thrust onward. The bumping and scraping had stopped. Sir Percival was conscious that the air was beginning to grow foul as the last units drained out of the oxygen tanks. He switched on the lights. The porpoises had vanished. There were no more cables visible.

"Surface! Full speed!" he ordered. The *Conger* tilted sharply upwards and broached. Sir Percival rolled back the hatch cover. The tart, stinging salt night air filled the little submarine.

He took an observation. They were alone on the surface of a moderate sea. Overhead was the broad band of the Milky Way. Behind them, many miles behind, lay the dark shore-line of France. There was not another craft in sight.

The Commander said softly, "Thank you, Geordie!" and pointed his bow for England and what he knew awaited him there.

* * *

*ANSWERS to BEGINNERS, PLEASE on page* 68

1. "*Crime and Punishment*," by Feodor Dostoevsky.
2. "*The Lady's Not for Burning*," by Christopher Fry.
3. "*Bengal Lancer*," by F. Yeats-Brown.
4. "*The Snows of Kilimanjaro*," by Ernest Hemingway.
5. "*Sense and Sensibility*," by Jane Austen.
6. "*The Anniversarie*," by John Donne.
7. "*Remembrance of Things Past*," by Marcel Proust.
8. "*The Postman Always Rings Twice*," by James M. Cain.

* * *

*SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page* 144

*Across.*—1, Shamrock. 5, Hinges. 9, Deaf mute. 10, Valour. 11, Twilight. 12, Runway. 14, Peppercorn. 18, Broken neck. 22, Ealing. 23, Blow-lamp. 24, Victim. 25, Turnpike. 26, Ripley. 27, Reverend.

*Down.*—1, Sedate. 2, Arabia. 3, Remain. 4, Catch-penny. 6, In a hurry. 7, Goodwood. 8, Straying. 13, Apiculture. 15, Observer. 16, Foolscap. 17, Lean kine. 19, Twinge. 20, Marine. 21, Spread.

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# Time's Revenges

## by ALDOUS HUXLEY

IT was warm, and there were the usual palms and hibiscus bushes and, along the edge of the terrace, a magenta glare of mesembrianthemums. Lying back in her deck chair, Mrs. Peele alternately looked at the Pacific and, with a ghostly echo of the old delight, reread the *Iliad*. She was near the end of the Third Book, and here, blond and beautiful, like that intoxicating Baron von Dittersdorf, who had told her by moonlight that his liebe was stronger than tod, and then, next morning, had borrowed five hundred dollars—here was Paris, ignominiously trounced by the man he had cuckolded. Here was bosomy Aphrodite to the rescue. Here was poor Helen, desperately trying to live down the past and telling her curly-headed baron exactly what she thought of him. Boaster, weakling, coward! And the baron's only answer—it had always been his only answer—was to carry her off to bed. The old non sequitur of love, the prehistoric sexual routine. But the one was convincing and the other worked.

Worked then, thought Mrs. Peele as she lowered her book, and still works today. Works in spite of Korea and atomic energy, in spite of all their Holy Years and Dialectical Materialisms. But not in spite of old age. She sighed, took out her compact and, as she powdered her aquiline nose, peered at the image in the convex mirror. Fifty-one last June, and then nephritis; she looked a hundred and twenty.

There was a sound of footsteps behind her. She turned her head. Enormous, a football player on the verge of running to fat, young Peter Foss was ponderously bearing down on her.

"How are you feeling today?" he asked solicitously. Even his voice was somewhat beefy, like a T-bone steak made richly audible.

Mrs. Peele shrugged her shoulders, couldn't decide whether she felt weaker by contrast or stronger by contagion.

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★★★★★ FIVE-STAR EVENT!

## A New Story by a Brilliant Writer

## —Caustic Wit flickering ironically about the Fires of Love

Peter's laughter was the equivalent of an enormous filet mignon—thick, juicy, tender.

"How I love your wit!" he cried.

Mrs. Peele remembered the face in her convex mirror.

"There isn't much else to love," she said. "Just a skull and a skeleton."

"And a *soul*!" said the young man with emphasis. He laid a hand on the frail pipe-stick of her forearm and gave her a smile of almost filial admiration and tenderness.

Mrs. Peele smiled back at him. She was touched; but within her, at the same time, a small, dry demon of irony was making the usual derisive comments.

How earnest he looked, how beamingly the Social Worker—almost the Moral Re-armer! And even if he did feel towards her like a son, even if he genuinely wanted to be kind and Christian, was it really possible for a young man in his position to behave disinterestedly? For, after all, who was he? The West Coast Representative of the Birnbaum Foundation. In other words, a professional fund-raiser. Or, in yet other words, a parasite on the ageing rich.

A parasite, of course, with the best intentions, and for the highest of causes. But still a parasite. Like Franz von Dittersdorf—only a good deal less amusing. Peter's liebe wasn't any stronger than tod; it was hardly stronger than drug-store coffee. But at fifty-one that was all one was entitled to expect—the mildest kind of decaffeinized affection. In exchange for which these latter day parasites considered themselves entitled to expect, not a mere five hundred for champagne and gambling debts, but forty or fifty thousand to finance a Report on Negro Housing in the Deep South—or was it Eskimo Housing in the Deep North? She burst out laughing.

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"What's so funny?" Peter asked in a tone of slightly offended bewilderment.

"I was just thinking of igloos," she answered.

"What *are* you talking about?" he asked.

"Prefabricated igloos," Mrs. Peele went on. "Transported in deep-freezers. The whole project financed by grants from the Birnbaum Foundation." Then, changing her tone, "Isn't it strange," she added, "the way rich people still go on giving away money in order to save their souls? Even when they know quite well that they haven't got the kind of souls that can be saved?"

Peter Foss opened his mouth to speak; then changed his mind and closed it again.

"What were you going to say?" she asked.

"Nothing."

Mrs. Peele was disappointed. She had hoped to provoke him into saying something earnest and eloquent about Life Eternal—and then, my God, how she'd have jumped on him! But, as she had had occasion to observe before, the boy wasn't nearly so dumb as he looked.

"We've got an interesting new guest at the hotel this morning," he said at last.

"Who?"

"No less a person than Oscar Hackett."

Mrs. Peele made no movement, uttered no word of comment. Her heart had started to beat very fast and she felt suddenly breathless. Did he know that she had once been married to Oscar? Why had he announced his arrival so abruptly?

"*The* Oscar Hackett," Peter went on, a little piqued, it was evident, by her show of disinterest.

"The Oscar Hackett?" she queried, feeling sure, now, that he knew nothing. After all, he'd hardly been born when it all happened.

"You know," he said, "the philanthropist."

"Of course I know," said Mrs. Peele in a sudden, startling outburst of gaiety. "Philanthropist. From philein, to love, and anthropos, man. He loves the human race. In fact, he just adores it."

At the thought of Oscar adoring the human race, and at the same time trampling with impartial insensitivity on every member of that race with whom he came in contact, she uttered a little snort of half-suppressed laughter. How ludicrous it all was, how utterly, bitterly absurd!

"There's nothing to sneer at," said Peter gravely. He leaned towards her, and suddenly his tone and expression were almost clerical. Speaking slowly and with a measured emphasis, he said, "I can't think of any man who has deserved better of his generation than Mr. Hackett. All those splendid gifts for World Peace . . . "

"And now," said Mrs. Peele derisively, "we're in the first year of the second Hundred Years War."

"And those Hackett Fellowships," Peter went on, ignoring the

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interruption. "And above all his work for the Reunion of the Churches. You see, he's a deeply religious man."

"Deeply religious," she repeated in a parody of his serious tone.

And yet, ridiculous as it now seemed, that was why she had fallen in love with him. There had been others as good-looking, others who were more attractive. But nobody else had radiated Oscar's crusading zeal, nobody else had ever marched into her mother's drawing-room with the conquering air and prophetic manner of Richard Coeur de Lion.

"Mr. Hackett," Peter was saying, "is a dedicated soul."

The one dedicated soul in a world where everyone else was interested only in politely killing time and, in the intervals, making yet more money. He came charging into that world like an Early Christian bull in a china shop of frivolities. To a young girl who had just seen through all the elegant shams of her mother's existence and was still in a state of shocked revolt against the ugliness of its reality, the bull's performance seemed altogether wonderful.

"Truly dedicated," the young man insisted.

Yes truly dedicated—but to what kind of a God? Deeply religious—but couldn't you say the same of Torquemada; couldn't you say the same of the High Priest of Moloch?

It was not until after their marriage that Anne Peele had begun to ask herself those questions. In her own perverse and exasperating way, her mother had asked them long before. Shutting her eyes, Mrs. Peele could hear that soft voice drawling away across the gulfs of dead time.

"He could hardly be handsomer," it said, "and he certainly couldn't be any richer. But did you have to choose somebody who was so revoltingly *good*?" At the time they were spoken the words had seemed almost blasphemous. But now . . .

She thought of Oscar, so hag-ridden by the ideals he had inherited from that ferocious old mother of his, so hoodwinked by his ready-made convictions of what ought to be, that he didn't notice, could hardly even see or hear, what was actually going on about him.

"I'm a realist," he liked to boast, "I'm a man who always faces the facts."

But the only facts he ever faced were the facts in Census Reports and White Papers. Of such humbler realities as a young girl's body, a young wife's feelings—anybody's feelings, if it came to that—he had always been completely unaware. Being aware takes time, takes effort, and Oscar was too busy being good.

"Why can't they leave people alone?" she said aloud.

"Who?"

"All these damned philanthropists."

Peter smiled indulgently and shook his head.

"We can't stand by idle," he said.

"Why not?"

"We've got to do the good as we see it."

"But that's the point: you don't see it."

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"That's why we need more men like Mr. Hackett," said Peter.

"Mister Hackett," she repeated, suddenly struck by the fact that, in the young man's conversation, the names of the very rich were never mentioned without their qualifying title of respect.

"Men with vision," he went on, "men with a social conscience, men with . . ."

"With eighty million dollars."

The young man looked at her for a moment in silence, then gave her another of those indulgent smiles of his.

"What is it," he asked, "that makes you want to seem more cynical than you really are?"

The answer, of course, was "You." You, Peter, the virtuous leech, the high-minded and altruistic tapeworm. But she left the words unspoken. After all, he was a very nice young man; and she a tired, lonely old woman. Mrs. Peele laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose you think you know what I really am."

He looked at her for a moment in silence, then nodded his head.

"Better than you do yourself."

He had dropped his pulpit manner and once again, tenderly, admiringly, protectively, it was a son who spoke to her. A son . . . With excruciating vividness she remembered the flushed thin face of the little boy under the oxygen tent. If he had lived, little Dick would be twenty-eight next December the third. A year older than Peter. Her eyes filled with tears.

"The self *you* know," she heard him saying, "is the self you've had to fabricate—in mere self-defence. What I know is the self you fundamentally are."

It was just uplift, of course, just Liberal Christian twaddle, just the patter of a good salesman, whose line happened to be organized charity rather than vacuum-cleaners. Butter them up! Give the old girls something that'll make them feel good! Mrs. Peele would have liked to laugh, but was afraid that if she opened her mouth, she might start sobbing. For of course it was absolutely true. She had transformed herself into someone else, someone quite different from the girl who had set out with her Richard Coeur de Lion on a crusade to make the world a better place to live in. And it had been done in mere self-protection, just as he had said.

She thought of those seven years of her marriage with Oscar; remembered the strange blue glare of his eyes and the cleaving chin, the eager profile—like the prow of an ice-breaker. And the ice was alive and vulnerable. It was the body he had been too puritanical, too respectful of his mother, to do anything but furtively violate. It was the mind he had had no time to train or even understand. It was the personality he was forever snubbing and humiliating, not out of any perverse delight in cruelty, but merely because he had other, higher things to think about than a woman's sensibilities.

She had gone to him defenceless, in a total self-surrender, and he had forced her into armour. Layer upon layer of it—snubproof,

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outrageproof, proof against the most penetratingly solemn words, the most idealistic eloquence. After little Dick had died, there was no occasion for her ever to take it off. Absolutely no occasion ; for, each in his own way, Oscar's successors had been as bad as Oscar himself.

Towards Franz, it was true, she would always feel a certain gratitude. Gratitude for an apocalypse ; for he had initiated her into the nocturnal mysteries, had revealed the impersonal otherness of her own deepest being, had made her taste the ineffable beatitudes of extinction.

When he kissed her, there was no more armour and nobody any more to wear the armour. Only a blissful alienation, a dark yet living and conscious absence. But every darkness is the prelude to another day, and by day Franz von Dittersdorf was nothing but an impudent adventurer—a crook, and rather a stupid crook at that, who finally became insupportable.

But when Franz had been got rid of, there was poor Johnny MacPhail, drunkenly oscillating between maudlin sentiment and brutality. And then, after Johnny, Lancelot. But Lancelot was an actor and could never be anything else, even at his mother's funeral, even in bed. And finally, when she turned in despairing revulsion towards the other pole of existence, she had found, not God, not peace, not charity, but an obscene mingling, in that unspeakable little Donald Peele, of Neo-Scholastic intellectualism with an almost infantile vanity, of erudite and unctuous talk about the Spiritual Life with a mean soul's petty spitefulness. In response to Donald, her armour had turned into a panoply of derisive counter-attack.

She was back where she had been with Oscar. Only now it was worse, much worse. For now she was old. There would be no more absences and extinctions, no new revelations of the otherness beyond personality. There was, and there could be, only her waking daytime self—only this weary sense of being the victim of a failing body, only this constantly repeated realization that she had lost, irrevocably, all that had once reconciled her to existence, only this chronic consciousness of frustration. And the frustration was inescapable, because it had somehow been predestined. She was foredoomed to it, had no choice but to invite it.

Frustration after frustration, through the whole gamut. And the latest of them was the frustration of her affection for this absurd boy. How touchingly ingenuous he had seemed at their first meetings, how kind and thoughtful, how genuinely concerned to do the will of God. And then he had talked about the Birnbaum Foundation, and everything was called in question.

Was the goodness merely professional ? Was the affection a stratagem ? Was the religion just a part of his stock-in-trade ? And now he was licking his chops over Oscar, was savouring in advance that juicy gobbet from the eighty-million-dollar table of the deeply religious man of vision. How odious everything was, how senseless, aimless, hopeless !

Peter Foss glanced at the half-averted face beside him, saw the

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brightness of tears on the lashes, and, tactfully turning away, started to fill his pipe. *Thank you, dear God*, he said to himself; for he was grateful for having been inspired to say what was so obviously the right thing. To grow old with a heart of stone—no, not even of stone, with a heart of tin, a heart of plastic—could one imagine a worse punishment? Somehow or other this unhappy woman must be rescued from her own suicidal flippancy and cynicism. He had realized that from the first moment of their acquaintance. And now God had shown him the way. He had spoken, almost at random, and his words had touched her, had actually made her cry. *Thank you, thank you.*

And all of a sudden another inspiration came to him. He was just taking the pipe out of his mouth in order to give it utterance, when Mrs. Peele abruptly broke a silence which she had begun to find oppressive.

"Do you know Oscar Hackett personally?" she asked in a flat voice.

Peter had to make an effort to repress his annoyance at the interruption.

"I only know his wife," he answered.

Mrs. Peele looked at him sharply.

"His wife?" she repeated; then remembered the existence of that awful Muriel.

"I met her last year," he explained, "at the Conference on Juvenile Delinquency."

"Does she go in for that kind of thing?" Mrs. Peele inquired.

The young man nodded.

"During the last year or two," he said, "Mr. Hackett has delegated almost all his philanthropic activities to her. You'll enjoy her. She's a lovely person."

A lovely person . . . As though by magic the words restored Mrs. Peele to her normal state of ironic equanimity. A really lovely person!

"And there she was in the lobby. I was never more pleasantly surprised in my life."

"Another old lady to use your charm on," said Mrs. Peele.

He made no comment, and there was a long silence.

Suddenly the smell of tobacco and shaving lotion grew stronger in her nostrils. She turned and saw that Peter was leaning confidentially towards her with that look of beaming earnestness which always presaged the utterance of something edifying. This time, she decided, and smiled, this time she would really let him have it.

"Do you remember what I was saying just now?" he began.

"About what I really am?"

"About what you really are," he repeated in a tone whose seriousness was the implicit reproof of her levity.

"Go on," said Mrs. Peele. "I adore talking about myself."

"And that's why you haven't got any self to talk about."

Mrs. Peele laughed—but a little uncomfortably.

"If you pay attention to what you think you are, you'll never become what you really are."

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"Then what should one pay attention to?"

"I won't tell you."

"Why not?"

"You'd only laugh."

"No, I wouldn't."

"And anyhow," Peter went on, "you know it already."

"I don't."

"You know it, you've always known it and you always will. But whether you'll want to do anything about it is another question."

Beef, evangelical beef. And yet, as the silence lengthened out, Mrs. Peele became aware of the young man as something more than this congenial and yet absurd presence—became aware of him as the source of a kind of radiance, as the centre from which a life that was not merely Peter's communicated with a life that was not merely her own.

"The trouble is," she said at last, without looking at him, "the trouble is that, whenever I've tried to act on it, somebody's always come along and made complete nonsense of the whole idea."

She thought of Oscar and the nonsense he had made of crusading idealism; of Donald and the slime he had spread over the saints; of Peter himself and his way with the old ladies. And then there was Franz—Franz the incomparable lover, the insupportable pimp. Even the dark gods had been desecrated for her. "Complete and utter nonsense," she repeated emphatically.

"But after all," he began, "truth doesn't vary with the people who speak it. It's independent . . ."

But once again he was checked in mid-career. Feet crunched behind him on the gravel and in a rather doubtful, questioning tone a shrill feminine voice pronounced his name. Frowning, Peter turned his head, then readjusted his expression and rose with alacrity to greet the newcomer.

"But how delightful!" he cried.

Under the concealing brim of her wide straw hat, Mrs. Peele wondered who on earth he was being delighted about this time.

"Thank goodness it's you!" said the shrill voice. "I'm so dreadfully short-sighted, I never know who I'm talking to. It's quite embarrassing when you discover you've been calling a perfectly strange man 'darling.'" There was a coy giggle.

Mrs. Peele raised the brim of her hat and saw a fat middle-aged woman, with dyed hair and wearing a pale blue print, in the act of sitting down rather cautiously on the chair which Peter had just vacated. The head came round, revealing a face which she recognized but could not put a name to. Then Peter did it for her.

"This is Mrs. Hackett," he said.

But of course! The lovely person—as large as life. Considerably larger even.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything," said the squeaky voice.

"Nothing crucial," Mrs. Peele answered. "Or was it?" She looked up at the young man with a quizzical smile.

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Mrs. Hackett gave him no time to answer. "Peter was telling me such interesting things about his survey of Negro Housing."

"Yes, isn't it thrilling!" said Mrs. Peele with ironic emphasis.

"I just longed to hear some more. That is, if you'll tell me."

Fascinated, Mrs. Peele watched her as she gave Peter the shy, coy smile of an adolescent making her first experiments in seduction.

Emollient, its native beefiness boiled down to the colloidal state of jellied consommé, the voice of Peter Foss came back to her.

"I shall be only too happy," it said. "But meanwhile I want you to know Mrs. Peele."

In Muriel's large myopic eyes Mrs. Peele could detect no recognition or questioning curiosity.

"*Anne* Peele," she specified.

Again there was no reaction from Muriel. And why should there be, after all? It was the best part of twenty years since they had met at somebody's enormous cocktail party in Washington. She had been Anne MacPhail in those days, and Muriel was already as blind as a bat and too vain to wear spectacles. If she herself remembered the incident so vividly, it was because she had been curious to see the woman whom Oscar had chosen as her successor.

For a whole evening she had watched her from across the room—watched with an amazed amusement that gave place after a time to a painful sense of humiliation. For if *that* was what Oscar really liked, and if he had once liked her, then she must have something in common with Muriel. And Muriel was busily revealing herself as being everything she had always most cordially abhorred. Fluffy and twittering, infantile but a bitch; the sort of woman who liked to talk to men about Little Me; who behaved with deliberate silliness so that old gentlemen might smile indulgently and think she was too cute for words; who uttered baby laughter and lifted baby eyes, inviting all males to constitute themselves the protectors and would-be violators of an innocence well below the age of consent.

And now here she was again, twenty years after, but still Muriel—Muriel with a vengeance, Muriel raised, so to speak, to a higher power by the passage of time. For beneath an excess of the rouge and powder, the little, round, baby face was wrinkled now and had started to sag. And what had once been a charming body was now enormously out of proportion with the head—a mound of middle-aged flesh topped, incongruously, by a doll. But, meanwhile, her style of dressing, the tone of her voice, the things she said and the way she said them—all were unchanged.

Here were the same frills, the same ribbons, the same bright pale colours. And the same half-witted canary chirped the same imbecilities; the same parody of a child opened the same blue eyes and appealed for the same nauseating kind of avuncular lechery. Today the appeal was being directed, not to one of those elderly industrialists or professors of economics who were her predestined and legitimate victims, but to this boy in his twenties. Doubly incestuous, she was asking someone who might have been her son to become her daddy.

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"And what about the organisational set-up?" Muriel was saying. And, before Peter could answer, she turned to Mrs. Peele and said, in a stage whisper, "I haven't the faintest idea what organisational set-ups are. All I know is that Mr. Hackett is tremendously keen on them. But tremendously!" She gave vent to a teen-age giggle.

Peter laughed, too—laughed, to all appearances, with genuine amusement. What was it, Mrs. Peele wondered, what was it that made otherwise quite rational men succumb to this kind of female infantilism? Even Oscar.

She remembered how, at that cocktail party, he had shown Muriel off to a little circle of bankers and politicians—like the proud father of an enfant terrible, like the impresario of a midget. Roaring with laughter, calling for silence when she was about to utter one of her priceless gems, repeating the inanities to those who had been lucky enough not to hear them.

But she also remembered the brutal way he had cut her short when she interrupted a conversation that seemed to him important—remembered Muriel's hurt look and the mounting flush of humiliation, the gallant attempt to force a smile and pretend that nothing had happened. It had all seemed painfully familiar.

Mrs. Peele sighed profoundly. There was something, she reflected, unutterably dismal about the consistency with which people always lived up to character. As though they were acting in one of those old comedies, where every personage has a name corresponding to his nature—Sneerwell perpetually sneering, Belch forever in his cups, Horner indefatigably making cuckolds, and now Twitterbaby, at fifty, repeating word for word, gesture for gesture, the performance of Twitterbaby at thirty, Twitterbaby at twenty, Twitterbaby ever since the age of puberty.

Nothing had changed except her weight. In the old days the actress was no heavier than the personage she represented. But now the part of Twitterbaby was being taken by one of those massive veterans who insists on playing Juliet, even though their status as grandmothers can no longer be concealed by tightest lacing, the most golden of wigs.

And meanwhile the two voices, the deep and the shrill, talked on and on. It was a sonata for canary and jellied beef—now a rich consommé punctuated by ecstatic bursts of twittering, now the sustained dicky-bird, with occasional colloidal accompaniment. How eloquently one could write about it in the annotated programme!

"At this point there occurs the celebrated legato passage for unaccompanied beef. With indescribable tenderness the jelly quiveringly yearns for the canary's money; but the answer is only a coy pizzicato in the treble. Modulating in masterly style from G-minor to C-sharp major, our beef now proclaims its exclusive attachment to the birdie's soul and suggests the joys of heaven in a series of impressive chords, which are soon repeated, two octaves higher, in the vox canarica . . ."

How ludicrous it all was! And yet how painful, how humiliating!

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For this farce was the grotesque symbol of man's destiny, the epitome and caricature of human life. The life and destiny of incommensurable lovers; of mothers whose children are all changelings; of intimates incapable of communicating with one another; of island universes forever at cross purposes. And the farce went on and on, not through three acts, or five, but indefinitely. Each morning, one wakened afresh to the same degrading compulsion of having to utter the same stale nonsense, to act out the familiar futilities. Day after day, sameness after sameness, like one of those revolting processions of caterpillars, the horror of endless repetition. And then, abruptly, the other, the infinitely greater horror, not of endlessness, but of the end; the ultimate and total humiliation that was death . . .

"Mrs. Peele."

She started and looked up. Enormous, like a Hercules in tweeds, Peter Foss was standing beside her.

"Will you excuse us?" he said, laying a hand on the back of her chair and bending over her with his most touchingly filial smile.

Under his elbow, Mrs. Peele caught a glimpse of Muriel's broad blue posterior wobbling away in high heels towards the hotel.

"We're going to visit for a few minutes with dear old Mrs. Schlag."

Dear old Mrs. Schlag—owner of half an oil field. The high-minded parasite was on the march again.

"Thank you, Peter," she said and patted his hand.

"Thank me for what?"

"For cheering me up."

"But I haven't done anything."

"You don't have to do anything. You merely have to exist."

In silence, because he did not know what to say, Peter looked down at her. It was a thin, worn, suffering face; but in their bony sockets the grey eyes shone with mischief and the rather full lips were curved into a smile of delicate irony. A most disquieting smile. But a moment later Peter remembered to feel sorry for the poor woman. To this unhappy victim of her own tin and plastic heart, of course it must seem comic that anyone should be a Christian.

"May we go on with our talk some other time?" he asked in the intimate and meaningful tone of one who shared sacred secrets.

This time, thought Mrs. Peele, the voice was a pot au feu. Beef at its most domestic; chunks of poor old Bossy simmered for hours in the smelliest corner of a fourteenth-century kitchen; the food of simple-hearted peasants, masticated by candlelight and to the sound of the Angelus . . .

"With the greatest of pleasure," she answered airily. "And now you must run away from dear old me to dear old Mrs. Schlag."

He started to protest; but she gave him a little push to speed him on his way.

"Good-bye my pet, and good hunting."

The large heavy feet went crunching away over the gravel. Mrs.

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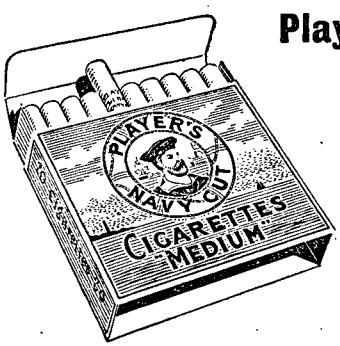
**Whatever the pleasure**

**Player's complete it**




*Player's Please*

[NCC 808] PLAYER'S NAVY CUT CIGARETTES AND TOBACCO

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Peele laughed noiselessly, then all of a sudden felt herself overcome by a kind of dry misery, a sense of inner hollowness, of being dusty and desiccated to the very core. After a few minutes she got up, walked back to the hotel and went up to her room.

For lack of knowing what else to do, she changed her dress and, yet again, carefully made up her face; then switched on the radio. A preacher was shouting something about the blood of the Lamb. She turned the knob. ". . . a touch of acid indigestion," said a voice almost as beefy as Peter's. Turned again, and it was a hooting contralto, hungry for somebody's lips. Again, and the news from the front was worse than ever. The wheel had come full circle, from blood, through the stomach and the genitals, back to blood again. She silenced the machine and walked out onto the balcony.

Below her were the same old palm trees and the gaudy magenta carpet of flowers, and beyond the flowers, rising to the level of her eyes, the vast, mild blueness of the sea. And this was the view for which one paid three dollars a day extra on the price of a room. It wasn't worth it.

She turned her head and was startled to find that, separated from her only by a stucco parapet, a man was sitting on the balcony next to hers. His chair was turned so that she could see only the back of his head and the silhouette of his left cheek and temple. But that was enough; for that was all she had ever seen of Oscar, when she ventured into his study—a back and one surprisingly small ear and the vanishing third quarter of a face deliberately averted from all intrusion on his enormously important labours.

"Darling," she would venture to murmur at last, and again, more apprehensively, after another twenty seconds, "Darling?"

At the third or fourth repetition he would say, "One-moment, please." And finally, perhaps a minute later, the head would come sharply up, the swivel-chair would whirl round and she would find herself confronted by the sternly noble face of a crusader who has just been interrupted, in the midst of his final, heroic assault on Jerusalem, by the most imbecile of blondes on the most frivolous of pretexts.

"What is it?" he would ask in a tone which made it very clear indeed that he was not to suffer fools gladly. "What is it?"

In the beginning, Mrs. Peele remembered as she looked at Oscar's immobile back, in the beginning, before she had forged her cuirass of indifference, her reaction had been to feel and behave like the fool he proclaimed himself unwilling to tolerate. Fear turned her into an idiot, incapable of saying anything, or, if she did speak, talking only nonsense.

"And what precisely," he would ask with an icy sarcasm, "what *precisely* does that mean?"

And she would stammer more incoherently than ever and, sitting there in judgment upon her, the indignant crusader would listen, his lips ever more tightly compressed, his brows ever more darkly frowning, until the tension of righteous exasperation became too great to be borne. And then, like a thunderclap it was out—the harsh and hurting word of contemptuous anger, irrevocable, irreparable.

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Yes, irreparable, Mrs. Peele repeated to herself, irreparable. For Oscar had never known how to make reparation. If he had, if he could ever have used a wholehearted regret for having hurt her as the means to a better understanding of himself and his victim, she would have welcomed these humiliations. But no, he must always be the crusader, ceaselessly possessed by a devil of abstract idealism and therefore convinced of his own virtue and incapable of humility.

When he tried to make reparation, it was not from below, but from above; not from an abased sense of having done something less than human, but from the lofty standpoint of a superior being who has unintentionally, and by the mere fact of being superior, wounded a member of the lower orders.

Instead of repentance, he offered her, out of the treasury of his own strength, condescending encouragement and a little sermon on how to behave better next time. And sometimes, incongruously and suddenly, the crusader would be overcome by the temptations of the flesh.

Without transition, without a preliminary word, the homily would give place to the most brutal and unskilful of caresses. And afterwards, whatever might have happened—whether she resisted this irrelevant outrage of her feelings, or surrendered to it in the hope of transforming it into a more human relationship—afterwards, he always felt ashamed of himself, and the shame made him so


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resentful of her part in contributing to his fall from crusading dignity that he would go out of his way to find new pretexts for blaming and humiliating her.

And yet, incomprehensibly, she had always loved him, or at least she had always hoped that, some day, he would make it possible for her to love him. But he never had, he never had.

Mrs. Peele sighed and then, shrugging her shoulders, crossed over to the parapet that separated the two balconies.

"Well, Oscar," she said almost playfully, "a penny for your thoughts."

Not, of course, that they were worth a penny. For who wanted to hear about organisational set-ups? Who cared two pins about the dilemmas of the very rich, torn between Negro Housing, World Peace, and Fellowships in Applied Sociology?

"A penny for your thoughts," she repeated more loudly.

There was still no answer. In his old age Oscar must have taken to overacting his own role.

"A penny for your thoughts," she almost shouted.

The man started and turned his head.

"Either you're deaf," Mrs. Peele began, "or else you . . ."

She broke off and stared in horrified silence at a face that was still recognizably Oscar's, and yet belonged to someone else, someone utterly different from the all-too-noble crusader of her painful or ironic memories. And it was not merely that the face was now that of an old man.

Those lines across the forehead and around the tense closure of the lips were the tracings, not of time, but of despair. And the same despair looked out at her from the wide, fixed eyes—an agonizing extremity of hopelessness, a knowledge of irremediable perdition.

Mrs. Peele was filled with a kind of panic terror.

"Oscar!" she whispered in a tone almost of protest.

He opened his mouth, but no words; tried again and finally spoke.

"Were you talking to me?" he asked.

"Oscar, don't you know who I am?"

"Who you are?" He stared at her for several seconds in silence, then went on doubtfully, "It's not Anne, is it?"

Mrs. Peele nodded affirmatively. Her first startled terror, as though at some apparition from another realm of being, had given place to compassion. She gave him her warmest, her most friendly smile.

There was another vacant interval. Then, with an enormous effort, he tried to smile back at her. The corners of the mouth twitched spasmodically and there was a movement in the folded skin of the cheeks. But all the time the eyes continued to deny the very possibility, not merely of joy and laughter, but of all human sympathy, even all awareness. The lost spirit within knew nothing but its own perdition.

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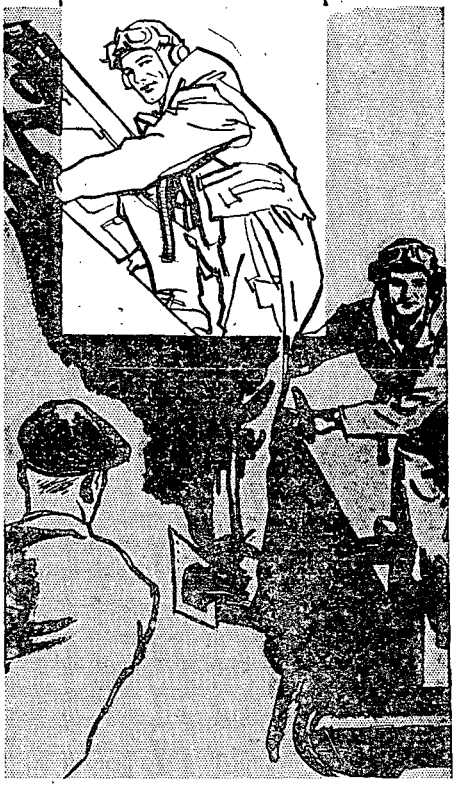

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As though conscious of the incongruity of his grimace, he turned away from her.

"It's been an awfully long time," he muttered.

"An awfully long time," she agreed. "And yet one remembers."

"Yes, one remembers."

His voice trailed off into silence.

Sameness after sameness, the endless procession of caterpillars . . . but this was worse. For here there had been an ending, a mortal transfiguration, an actual death in life.

Mrs. Peele leaned over the parapet and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Oscar, what's wrong?"

At first he wouldn't look at her, but only shook his head and went on staring sightlessly at the sea.

"Maybe I could help you."

Again he shook his head.

"Tell me," she insisted. "It'll make you feel better."

Her words and the passionate concern with which they were spoken made her think of that time she had found little Dick crying his heart out in the summer house at Mount Kisco. "Tell me, my darling, tell me." And at last it had come out—the small, trivial tragedy of the broken vase, of mademoiselle's refusal to listen to his side of the case, of the unfairness of a punishment he hadn't fully deserved. The memory of the suffering child deepened her pity for the man before her.

"Won't you tell me?" she begged.

"It wouldn't be any good," he said at last, almost inaudibly.

"Why wouldn't it be any good?"

"Because I'm no good."

"You?" she questioned incredulously. To the trampling and infallible Oscar she had known, the no-goods were everyone except himself.

"Sometimes I can forget for a little," he went on. "But then it all comes back."

"What comes back?"

For a reply he covered his face with his hands and shuddered.

"What comes back?" she repeated with an eager insistence.

There was no answer.

But to Mrs. Peele his silence was itself a confession. Why wouldn't he speak? What was the shame that forced him to hide his face from her? With a triumphant leaping of the heart she suddenly knew the answer. Knew it, not with her head, but in her bones; knew in the teeth of all the probabilities because she so passionately wanted it to be true; knew for an absolute certainty that Oscar had come at last to realize what he had done to her during those years of outrage and humiliation—to realize and regret.

The knowledge filled her with an almost exultant happiness. For in some obscure way everything was now changed. She had loved this man; and he, with his every word and act, had robbed her

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love of its meaning and taken away the reason for its existence. It had been a total denial, a reductio ad absurdum of her innermost being. But now he was sorry and his contrition proved that even in the most ruthless idealist there lurks a human being, sensitive, humble, capable of love and understanding. And if that were so, then she had been justified in feeling for him as she did.

Retrospectively, the farcical chaos of her existence took on a kind of sense. And this sense would become plainer as time went on. For, if Oscar were sorry, she could forgive him—oh, how gladly, how unreservedly! And along with forgiving would go plain giving—a giving of heart, time, strength, her whole self. Giving, she would receive; giving, she would be made whole again and happy.

It was what Peter was always saying. Twaddle to catch the old ladies with! And yet, "You know it and you've always known and you always will." This time, at last, she was going to be able to act on the knowledge.

She leaned forward and, for the third time, repeated her question.

"I can't tell you," he muttered.

"But you must."

He shook his head.

"Please, Oscar, please!"

"I can't."

There was a silence. Then she made her decision. If he couldn't bring himself to take the first step, she would take it for him.

"You can't," she said slowly, "because it's something about us."

He took down his hands and looked at her.

"About us?" he repeated uncomprehendingly.

"At Rome, do you remember? And then Sorrento. And Capri. And Taormina . . ." She was listing the successive horrors of their Italian honeymoon—one violation after another, and in the intervals, so exhaustingly educative it almost atoned for what the Puritan in Oscar would only regard as a criminal indulgence, long hours of penitential sight-seeing.

"Do you remember?" Mrs. Peele repeated. Her eyes were bright, her face transfigured by a smile of anticipatory forgiveness.

He continued to look at her in bewilderment, then shook his head.

"I don't know what you mean," he said at last. "It wasn't as if there was anything wrong."

"Nothing wrong?" she repeated, not wishing to believe that she could have heard his words correctly.

"After all, we were married."

Mrs. Peele felt as though a noose had been thrown around her heart and suddenly tightened. Then, in spite of the pain of that horrible constriction, she began to laugh.

"How can you!" he cried reproachfully, and once more covered his face.

"I'm sorry," she gasped between two paroxysms.

She tried to stop laughing, tried to tell him how deeply she felt for his unhappiness, how passionately she longed to help him. But

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her body was as though possessed by something alien and malignant, something that shook her from within, something that clutched at her throat when she tried to speak, and brought the tears into her eyes.

"Terribly sorry, Oscar."

The rest was drowned in a kind of whooping asthma of hilarity.

And suddenly, as though to justify himself against the implied criticism of her laughter, Oscar began to talk in a tone of agonized self-accusation about his sins. And his sins were not the driving insensitiveness, the blind idealism of which she and so many others had been victims; they were his weekly visits, between 1937 and 1939, to a red-headed girl called Patsy, who lived in an apartment on East Sixty-seventh Street.

The laughter died down, and Mrs. Peele was able to listen to him with all the appropriate marks of understanding and compassion. But in fact they were back again where (except in her own sentimental imagination) they had always been—in the middle of the fifty thousandth act of the old, old farce. And the farce had taken a disquieting turn for the worse.

Their worlds, as she had discovered in the first months of marriage, had always been different. But today the separating distances were immeasurably greater. He had moved, as it were, from Mars to Sirius, from Sirius clean out of the galaxy and into chaos.

"There's nothing to be so upset about," she said consolingly.

But no, he insisted, there had been no excuse. Even the fact that Muriel was much too pure to wish to have anything to do with him was no excuse. He ought to have had the strength to control his lusts. But when Patsy came along he had fallen immediately, without resistance.

"I hope at least she was pretty," said Mrs. Peele. "I hope she knew her business."

He refused to be laughed out of his misery. Patsy wasn't a joke. She was the symbol and occasion of all evil. For two years he had bought his right to her by endowing World Peace. Then came the invasion of Poland. It was a judgment, a manifest condemnation.

On September the fourth, he wrote Patsy a cheque for five thousand dollars, returned the key to her apartment, then went home and confessed to Muriel, who, being a wonderful woman, forgave him.

"*I'd* have forgiven you," Mrs. Peele could not refrain from saying, "if you'd ever asked me to."

He looked at her in surprise.

"But you never had anything to forgive me for," he said. "I mean, I was perfectly faithful."

"Perfectly faithful!"

That, surely, was the opening line of the fifty thousandth and first act.

"Whereas with poor Muriel," he groaned, "with poor Muriel . . . Oh, God! And yet she forgave me."

"And so all's well that ends well," said Mrs. Peele.

"But it hasn't ended," he protested.

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"You mean she still throws it in your teeth?"

He shook his head emphatically. Muriel had been absolutely wonderful. Never a reproach, never so much as the dropping of a hint. Complete forgiveness.

"Then why go on worrying?"

Because however complete the forgiveness, the offence remained; so did the offender. The one was a shameful fact of history, the other, a living defilement.

"After all," said Mrs. Peele, "you're not the first middle-aged husband to sleep with a pretty girl."

But Oscar was not listening, did not even hear her.

"Unclean," he kept repeating, "unclean."

"Nor the last," she added, interrupting in her turn; for she was determined to finish her sentence.

"I ought to be dead."

His voice trembled and broke, and she saw that he was crying.

"Oscar!" Her pity was mingled with an exasperated protest against such an inordinate ado about next to nothing.

But Oscar paid no attention. Sunk in the hell of his own despair, he was beyond her reach. She stood there helplessly, murmuring the kind of consolations one addresses to a stricken child, but conscious all the time that it was all completely useless.

"Oscar," she wheedled, "dear Oscar . . ."

"Oscar," shrill echo startlingly repeated.

Mrs. Peele looked up. Sky-blue and enormous, Muriel was standing in the open doorway between the balcony and Oscar's room. The doll's face was frowning, the baby voice was harsh with annoyance.

"What's all this nonsense?"

She crossed the balcony, laid a hand on Oscar's shoulder, and shook him roughly.

"I ought to be dead," Oscar moaned.

"Stop it!" cried Muriel angrily.

Then she turned to Mrs. Peele. Her breath smelt of alcohol. Dear old Mrs. Schlag must have provided cocktails.

"I hope he hasn't been bothering you," she said solicitously.

"Not bothering me," said Mrs. Peele. "But of course I couldn't help feeling extremely concerned."

Muriel smiled contemptuously.

"There's nothing to be concerned about," she said without compassion. "Once they get into this state, they go on and on."

"They?" Mrs. Peele repeated. She looked at this bowed and sobbing creature who had once been a man and was now merely one of "them," merely a typical specimen of some inferior species. "They?"

The doll nodded so emphatically that the blue bosom began to quiver.

"They all do it," she said with an expression of self-satisfaction. "Dr. Knoblock says it's like the rash in measles. Just one of the symptoms, that's all." And suddenly she gave a squeaky imitation of Oscar's despairing phrases. "'I ought to be dead, I ought to be

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dead.' " She hiccoughed. "Pardon me." Then back to the impersonation. "' I'm unclean, I'm no good.' Did he treat you to all that ? "

Mrs. Peele nodded, and the doll laughed delightedly at her own cleverness.

"And I bet he told you about his girl friend," she went on, talking over him, talking past him, as though he were only a piece of furniture, or at best some kind of mindless animal.

Then, warmed by the dry Martinis into confidential affectionateness, she leaned forward and laid a hand on Mrs. Peele's arm. "I like your dress," she said. "It's stunning."

"Thank you," said Mrs. Peele with cold distaste.

"But that isn't what I wanted to say. Only that dress is so fetching. Pardon me." And again, "Pardon me. My dear," she went on, lowering the squeak to a tragic whisper, "you have no idea what I've had to go through. Simply no idea. I mean, before this happened." She indicated Oscar. "And it's only two years since the first attack. And after his shock treatments he goes back to normal."

"Back to normal ? "

"Almost worse than normal," said the doll. "But then, after a month or two, this thing hits again."

She sighed, she did her best to look mournful ; but the blue eyes beamed with irrepressible triumph.

There was a starchy rustling and an instant later a plump little woman, all in white, came hurrying out on to the balcony and briskly patted Oscar on the head.

"Well, have you been a good boy while Nursie had her lunch ? "

Oscar made no answer, did not even lift his head.

"Take him in," said the doll.

Mrs. Peele watched him go then turned and, ignoring Muriel's protests, went back into her room and closed the door behind her.

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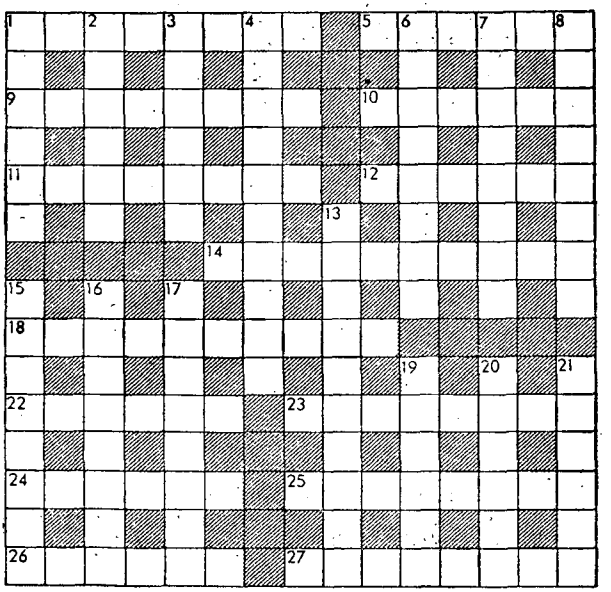
# *ARGOSY CROSS WORD*

**Solution on page 117**



## CLUES

### Across

**1** This might refer to the Blarney Stone, but though typically Irish it's vegetable (8).

**5** Turning points (6)..

**9** Defective outcome of a tame feud (4, 4).

**10** The highest award is for this (6).

**11** When the flickering shadows softly come and go! (8).

**12** A flying start (6).

**14** Suitable rent for a grocer? (10).

**18** This comes to those who are for the high jump! (6, 4).

**22** Where I live with Galen (6).

**23** It takes a little more than aplomb to make this light (4-4).

**24** "Alas, regardless of their doom, The little ——s play!" (Thomas Gray) (6).

**25** This used to take heavy toll on the roads (8).

**26** Epitaph on land under grass in Yorkshire (6).

**27** Right refers to a bishop (8).

### Down

**1** South eastern fruit of a quiet variety (6).

**2** "Far are the shades of ——" (Walter de la Mare) (6).

**3** Plea to stay concerns the water supply (6).

**4** The function of a slot-machine (5-5).

**6** The tortoise and the hare are an object lesson to those who are this (2, 1, 5).

**7** It sounds a more suitable place for hunting than racing (8).

**8** Displaced fish surrounded by its own poison (8).

**13** Hobby for a milliner? (10).

**15** A member of the Watch Committee joins the R.A.F.? (8).

**16** Rather a silly paper hat (8).

**17** They stood for hard times in Egypt (4, 4).

**19** Nice wet gin might cure this! (6).

**20** Proverbial listener to tall stories (6).

**21** Covering for bed or bread (6).

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*Student 357/3015:* I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it . . . *Student 778/2119:* I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student 184/315:* As you suggested, I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student 181/282:* You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they have offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student 591/287:* You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student 120/288:* I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student 1179/347:* I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student 1954/157:* I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**; they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student 171/162:* I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student 1106/156:* The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student 141/76:* The article which I wrote for the Second Test Paper appeared in the **SUNDAY MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation. . . . . .

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